



**ANTHONY  
THE ABSOLUTE**





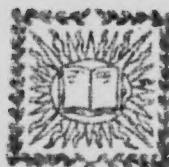


Heloise

# ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

BY  
SAMUEL MERWIN  
Author of "The Citadel," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY  
R. M. CROSBY



TORONTO  
BELL & COCKBURN  
1914



# A N T H O N Y THE ABSOLUTE

BY  
**SAMUEL MERWIN**  
Author of "The Citadel," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY  
**R. M. CROSBY**



TORONTO  
BELL & COCKBURN  
1914

PS  
3525  
E718  
A63  
1914

Copyright, 1914, by  
THE CENTURY CO.

Copyright, 1913, 1914, by  
THE McCCLURE PUBLICATIONS, INC.

*Published, February, 1914.*

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

|  | PAGE                |
|--|---------------------|
| Heloise . . . . .  | <i>Frontispiece</i> |
| "It was quite unavoidable," he said . . . . .  | 45                  |
| We leaned on the railing and breathed in the sweet April air . . . . .                             | 129                 |
| It was Heloise's bill for two weeks . . . . .  | 177                 |
| He reached out and tipped that convenient bottle   | 227                 |
| Standing motionless, he brought out his knife .  | 265                 |
| "Oh, Anthony, are you hurt?" . . . . .   | 273                 |
| "Get out," I said . . . . .  | 295                 |
| "Do we have to go right on, up to the last minute, Anthony, being so dreadfully casual?" . . . . . | 345                 |



**ANTHONY  
THE ABSOLUTE**



# ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

*At Sea — March 28th.*

**T**HIS evening I told Sir Robert What 's-His-  
Name he was a fool.

I was quite right in this. He is.

Every evening since the ship left Vancouver he has presided over the round table in the middle of the smoking-room. There he sips his coffee and liqueur, and holds forth on every subject known to the mind of man. Each subject is *his* subject. He is an elderly person, with a bad face and a drooping left eyelid. He wears a monocle; and carries his handkerchief in his left sleeve.

They tell me that he is in the British Service — a judge somewhere down in Malaysia, where they drink more than is good for them. I believe it. He tosses about his *obiter dicta* as if he were pope of the human intellect. A garrulous pope. Surely the mind of a judge, when exposed, is a dreadful thing!

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

Go where I will, of an evening, there is no peace for me. In the "social hall" some ungoverned young thing is eternally at the piano—"On the Mississippi" and "The Robert E. Lee" and the other musical literature of the turkey trot. I could not possibly sit five minutes there without shrieking. Outside, on deck, it has been raw and chill for a week, with rain penetrating my clothing and misting the lenses of my spectacles and rousing my slumbering rheumatism. And you can not sit long in a stuffy cabin, with the port screwed fast; it is unpleasant enough sleeping there. . . . So I have huddled myself each night in a corner of the smoking-room. I have played at dominoes. I have played at solitaire with cards. *And I loathe games!* But anything is a relief that will divert my mind, even for an instant now and then, from thoughts of that loose, throaty voice, and of the truly awful mind that animates it.

Few of the passengers ever give me more than a nod; for I am not what is called a "mixer." Except the Port Watch. He has looked confidently at me twice over his siphon. But I have not encouraged him, for he has an over-intense eye and the flush of drink is on his cheek. Every day, hours on end, he paces the deck; hence his nick-

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

name. He is, like myself, a lonely man; and a little wild — distinctly a little wild.

Sir Robert outdid himself this evening. No man could possibly know so much. I have made a list (not complete, of course) of the subjects on which he speaks with dogmatic authority — very positive, very technical, with a glib use of catch phrases, with emphasis always on the peculiarly significant point in the matter. The list runs:

Aéronautics; the American temperament as affected by immigration; archery; art; ballistics; dog-breeding; engineering (civil and military); ethnology; folk-lore of all nations; geology; horticulture; inferiority of Latin peoples (particularly the French); laces and embroideries; modern accounting; navigation (which he explained last night in detail to the Chief Officer, a silent person); psychology (all branches); Roman law; rugs (and textiles generally); *Weltpolitik*; wireless telegraphy; and, at all times and places, the glory of England and the superiority of English blood.

This evening he was dismissing, with a torrent of apparently precise ethnological and historical data, the recent Japanese pretension to Aryan origin — doubtless for the benefit of that little Japanese commercial agent with bad teeth who sat

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

in the corner opposite me working out problems on a go-board. The usual group of weak-minded persons were sitting about Sir Robert's table, listening with the usual awe.

Now, I rather like that Japanese. Only this morning he was so kind as to sing several examples of the folk-song of his country into my phonograph. Five records he gave me, so that my work is begun even before we land. Excellent specimens, two of them, of the Oriental tone sense, with observably different intervals for the ascending and descending scales.

He exhibited no sign that Sir Robert's talk annoyed him; quietly went on placing the little black and white shells on the board. (It is interesting to note, at this point, that the Japanese handle small objects with the first three fingers only, without employing the thumb as we do.) But I felt myself becoming angry. My forehead grew hot and flushed, as it always does when I am stirred. I tried to calm myself by constructing a house of dominoes; but the pitching of the ship overturned it.

Still that throaty voice. "Thank God," I thought, "in another day we shall be at Yokohama!"

I tried to read a four-weeks-old copy of the

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

*Illustrated London News.* No use ; the voice held me.

It occurred to me, as an exercise in self-control, to interest myself in speculating on the emotions and the characteristics back of the faces here in the smoking-room. I achieved some success at this exercise. Why, when you come to think of it, should each particular unit in this haphazard assemblage of men and women be journeying away off here to the other side of the earth? There are surely dramas in our little company. The two middle-aged ladies with the firm chins, for instance, who dress so quietly and speak so discreetly — it is whispered among the men that they are high and prosperous in a sad business on Soo-chow Road, Shanghai. And the young German adventurer with the scars across his nose, who borrowed fifteen dollars from me, to be repaid when we land at Yokohama — if he approaches me again I shall refuse him firmly. And the fat vaudeville manager from Cincinnati, who plays fan-tan every night with a heap of Chinese brass *cash* and a bowl borrowed from the ship's dining-room!

As I mused, I felt the Port Watch gazing at me again over his siphon. I believe he would pour out his story, were I to permit it. But I do not

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

choose to hear. After all, I am not a romancer, but a scientific man. My concern is not with the curious and personal tangle of human affairs, but with impersonal fact and sober deductions therefrom.

Sir Robert was now defining culture as the touchstone of civilization — from the British point of view, of course. God, that voice! And then, without a thought in my head as to where the talk was leading — suddenly — he plumped squarely down on my subject. It was the first time in the twelve days of our voyage. Until this moment, the tribal god referred to in his national anthem had spared him. *My subject!* The one thing I know more about than any other human being. I had him.

"The surest test of the culture of a people," said he, *ex cathedra*, "is the music of that people. Primitive races invariably express their emotions in primitive music. They try to tell me that the Chinese are a civilized people. 'Very well,' I say then; 'let me hear their music.' No nation has progressed far along the great highroad of civilization without coming into an understanding of the diatonic system. The Chinese civilized? When their finest musical instrument is the little *sheng*, a crude collection of twelve pipes that are not even

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

in tune? When they have failed to arrive at even a rudimentary perception of tonality and scale relationships? No; I tell you, the Chinese civilization is to the European as the little *sheng* is to the grand piano. The piano, on which all scales are related, all harmonies possible, is the supreme artistic achievement of the highest civilization."

This was enough. I got right up and went over to the round table. My forehead was burning; I must have been red as fire.

"You do not know what you are talking about," I cried out. I had to lean over the shoulder of one of the weak-minded in order to catch Sir Robert's eye. "It is the piano that has killed music in Europe! The piano is a lie from end to end of the keyboard. Bach confirmed that lie with his miserable triumph of the well-tempered clavichord. And in finally fastening his false scale upon us he destroyed in us the fine ear for true intervals that is to-day found only in your primitive peoples. The Chinese have it. The Javanese have it. The Siamese, most wonderful of all, have a true isotonic scale. But we of the *cultured* West (I put a wonderful sneering emphasis on that word) can not even *hear* true fluid music to-day, because our tone perception goes no farther than the barbarous mechanical compromise of the piano

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

keyboard. You do not know what you are talking about. You are a fool!"

When I am excited my voice rises and becomes shrill. I talked rapidly, so that no one could interrupt. And the weak-minded ones sank back in their chairs. They were actually afraid, I think now. In fact, when I paused the whole smoking-room was still as death.

I swept my eye about — commandingly, I think. The fat vaudeville man — he sat behind Sir Robert — was grinning at me with delight in his eyes, and was softly clapping his hands behind the fantan bowl. The Port Watch with red face and suddenly twinkling eyes, had clapped his hand over his mouth as if to smother an outright laugh. Sir Robert was looking up at me, his left eyelid drooping, a sort of perplexed uncertainty on his face — his old face that was all lines and wrinkles.

Now that I had the floor, it seemed worth while to make a thorough job of it, so I swept on :

" You make the piano the test of civilization. Greece had a civilization — where were the pianos of Greece? Oh, I am tired of your talk. I have listened to you for twelve long days and nights. I have suspected your accuracy, but I could not be sure, for you luckily avoided *my* subject. But

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

now I have you! And I know you for a fraud on all subjects! I see confusion in your face. You are groping for something to say about the music of Greece. Very well; I will say it for you. The Greeks had no piano, because they had no harmony. They did not know that harmony was possible. And if they had heard it, they would not have liked it."

"Ah," cried Sir Robert, flushing under the parchment of his skin, and (I must say) taking up the gage of battle, "but Greece gave us our diatonic system. The root of our scale, the tetrachord, came to us from the Greeks."

I laughed him down. "The intervals of that Greek tetrachord were not the same as ours. They used intervals that actually can not be written in our notation—three quarter tones, one and a quarter tones. Pythagoras states, 'The intervals in music are rather to be judged intellectually through numbers than sensibly through the ear.' For they followed the acoustic laws, *like the Chinese!* The fragments we have of the worship of Apollo are more nearly like the ancient Confucian hymn than like anything known in modern music. Tell me, sir, did you know that? And tell me this—does not the quality you call 'culture' imply that we should seek sympathetically for

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

the standpoint of other minds? Has it never occurred to you that when Oriental music sounds absurd and out of key to you, it is your own ear that is at fault — that the intervals are too fine and true for your false, piano-trained sense? For such is the fact."

I was shaking my finger under his nose, so closely that he had to lean back.

"And I will tell you," I added, standing right over him, "that the Chinese *sheng* has seventeen pipes, not twelve."

"Ah," he broke in, "but the other pipes are mute."

"Two are mute," I replied triumphantly. "And two are duplicates of others. The correct number of speaking pipes is fifteen."

His eyes were kindling now. "See here!" he cried. "Who and what are you?"

"I am a banker!" I shouted — the first thing that came to my tongue. Then I turned and walked straight out on deck. It was precisely the moment for leaving; even the weak-minded could see that their oracle was tripped. Besides, I had to be alone. For I was breaking into a profuse sweat. The drops were running down my forehead into my eyes and clouding my spectacles; I had to take them off and carry them in my hand.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

My under lip was quivering so that my teeth chattered. And my heart was palpitating, and skipping beats.

It was wet and wild and dark out there on deck; but in my intense moods I like the rough, elemental thing.

I stood right up to the storm, clinging to the weather-rail. The ship rolled away down, then away up, until I could see only the dim, scurrying clouds. The rain beat into my face. I felt happy, in a way.

A hand came down on my shoulder. I sprang away, and turned. I dislike exceedingly to have any one lay hands on me.

It was the Port Watch. He had put on a long raincoat, and a cap that was pulled low on his forehead. Under it I could see his eyes shining in a nervous, excited way. He certainly is a wild man, if there ever was one. But then I saw that he was grinning at me, and felt relieved.

"You sure did hand it to the old cock," he said, shouting against the storm. "It was great. I don't know a dam' thing about music. But I know when a bluff is called. He's gone below."

"Well," said I, for there was no need of being uncivil to the man, "I got sick of his voice. And then, he was wrong."

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

"Any one could see that," chuckled the Port Watch.

We walked around together to the lee side of the ship, so that he could light a cigar. And while I did not like his taking my arm, still he seems to be a decent fellow enough, after all. We exchanged cards. He is connected with a Stock Exchange house in New York. He is a big, vigorous man, surely not past his middle thirties. I rather envy him his strength, I am so thin and frail myself. He is one of those who know nothing of what we weaker ones go through who have to husband our energies. A rather primitive person, I should say. He occupies one of the high-priced cabins on the promenade-deck, with a private bath. It must be pleasant to travel that way.

When we parted at the after stairway, I said:  
"I did n't think I should like you. Shall I tell you why?"

"Yes," said he.

"Because you drink too much."

At this he stood still, his hands plunged into the pockets of his raincoat, chewing his under lip. Finally he said, with a break in his voice:

"You 're right there. I *am* drinking too much. But — God, if you knew!"

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

Then, without so much as a good night, he plunged off down the passage toward that comfortable room of his, with bath. And I went below to my stuffy cabin, where the port has been screwed fast for a week.

His name is Crocker, Archibald Crocker, Jr., son of the well-known and, truth to tell, rather infamous millionaire and manipulator of stocks. Our worlds lie wide apart, his and mine. I realized that much when he looked at my card. The name of Anthony Ives Eckhart conveyed nothing to him—the name that is known and respected by Boag and the great von Stumbostel of Berlin, by de Musseau, Ramel, and Fourmont at Paris, by Sir Frederick Rhodes of Cambridge; the name that spells anathema to that snarling charlatan, von Westfall, of Bonn.

Crocker has offered to guide me through the Yoshiwara district at Yokohama to-morrow evening. He says that the music will interest me.

I think I shall go with him. He says that every traveled white man in the world has been to "Number Nine"—that it is a legitimate, even necessary part of a man's experience. Certainly I do not wish to appear unmanly.

My room proved intolerable, and I was still too

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

excited to rest; so I came back to the deserted smoking-room to write up my journal.

It is very late. The steward is hovering anxiously about, yawning now and then. I may as well let the poor fellow get to his berth. God knows, he sees little enough of it.

But first I will have him fetch me a mug of their wonderful English stout. I find that this is even better than ale for inducing sleep. At least, in my own case.

*Yokohama, Grand Hotel, March 29th.*

**I**T was past three o'clock to-day when the ship came to anchor and the steam tender brought us ashore. It interested me to see the rickshaws with their bare-legged coolies. By the time we had ridden along the Bund to the hotel and secured our rooms it was four o'clock. We went down to the "lounge," Crocker and I, and had tea brought in. Or I did. He drank a whisky and *Tan San*. Then pretty soon he drank another.

Several couples from the ship were about, but not many of the men who were traveling alone.

"Where are they all?" I asked.

"Who?" said he.

"The men from the ship. Have they gone to other hotels?"

"Some of them — perhaps," he replied. Then he looked away and smiled.

Sometimes, when I talk with a hard, practical man of the world, I find myself feeling vaguely out of it all. My life, devoted as it is to the discovery and classification of facts, is certainly a practical life; yet I seem to dwell aside from the

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

main current. I do not quite catch the point of view of a rough-handed rich man like Crocker. And when I speak my mind, as I always endeavor to do, men do not resent it. I do not understand this. Come to think of it, I was decidedly outspoken last night with Sir Robert. He should have struck me; at least, he should have exhibited some anger. He would have struck Crocker, I think, in such a case—or jailed him for contempt.

We lingered nearly an hour over our tea and whisky. The experience was wholly new to me—comfortably seated in a large European hotel, with English folk and Americans all about, and yet with Japanese servants, and yellow, shrewd little Oriental faces behind the desk, and a Chinese cashier in a blue robe, and Chinese sailors pressing in on one, samples on arm, offering to make suits of clothes overnight. And out the window, floating about the glittering harbor, sampans and a great Chinese junk or two, and the fleet of fishing-boats with ribbed sails just skimming in between the breakwaters. We were the West, we and our absurdly Anglo-Saxon hotel; but all about us were hints and flavors of the eternal East.

Suddenly I realized that Crocker had been for quite a little time twisting restlessly in his arm-chair. I looked at him now. He was tapping the

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

carpet softly but very rapidly with his right foot, and rubbing his chin with his hand. Crocker's chin is of good size and shape, the sort we usually speak of as "strong." He is a dark man, inclined to fullness in the face and figure, but still athletic in appearance. His eyes are brown. He is not at all a bad-looking fellow, when you study him out. I rather like the blend in him of vigor, and perhaps stubbornness, with frankness. I should say that apart from the abnormal experiences, whatever they may be, that have driven or drawn him to this part of the world, he is a man of will and spirit. He would fight, I think, in a pinch. When fully himself, in his own home and business environment, he must be a man's man. He is nearly a head taller than I.

He caught me looking at him, and smiled.

"Well," said he, "shall we go along?"

"Where?"

"On that little expedition we spoke of last night."

"Oh!" I remembered now. "But — is n't it — do we want to go to such a place now — in the day-time?"

He raised his eyebrows. "You old sybarite!" he chuckled, and hummed, "*Et la nuit, tous les chats sont gris!*" Then he added, more seriously:

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

"But really, Eckhart, three ships are in to-day — the Pacific Mail and the French liner besides ours — and if we wait until evening we shall have no choice at all."

"Very well," said I then, briskly, for I do not like to be ridiculed. "Just wait until I can get my phonograph."

"Your *what?*" said he.

"My phonograph," I repeated, with dignity. And I went upstairs for it.

When I came down, with the heavy instrument in its case under one arm and a box of new record cylinders under the other, he was not in the lounge. I passed on out to the porch, and found him there with two rickshaws waiting. When he saw me with my heavy burdens, he began laughing in that nervous, jumpy way he has. But I ignored him, and placed the boxes carefully in my rickshaw. We were about to start when I realized that I had forgotten my record-taking horn, so I went back for it.

"Look here, old man," said Crocker, from his rickshaw, when I reappeared, "it's all right, of course,— I don't mind,— but what on earth are you bringing all that junk for?"

"You were so good as to explain that I would find the music interesting," I replied. "You

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

surely don't suppose that I trust my ear in this delicate research work. Why, my dear fellow, in my studies of our American Indian songs I have succeeded in recording intervals as close as the sixteenth part of a tone."

He was still grinning. "All right," he said; "don't get stuffy. I'll be good. Hop into your rickshaw."

I did so. The coolies turned for directions. Crocker was about to give them when two of our fellow passengers, accompanied by their wives, stepped out of the hotel. Crocker waited, and we sat there, looking rather foolish, until they had passed on out of ear-shot; then he leaned forward and said in a low voice:

"Number Nine."

"Heh!" cried the two coolies instantly, as one man, and wheeling about they ran the little vehicles out of the court and into the street.

I must admit that my first impression of the Yokohama streets was rather disappointing — that is, until we turned a corner unexpectedly and entered the Yoshiwara district. The streets were much more like England than the Japan of my fancy. Crocker tells me that Yokohama was built up as a foreign concession for purposes of trade, and therefore is really not Japanese at all. But

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

once in the Yoshiwara quarter my nerves began to tingle; for this was a bit of Japan.

Crocker insists that it is small and tawdry compared to the Tokio Yoshiwara. Never having explored that portion of the capital, I can not say. To me it was quite enchanting. The houses were higher than is customary in Japanese cities. In color all were of the unpainted but pleasantly weathered shade of light brown that is so agreeable to the eye — very possibly they stain the wood, as we do in the case of our modern bungalows. There were little hanging balconies on the upper stories, with decorative festoons of colored paper lanterns. Through the windows and the open doorways one caught glimpses of the spring flowers and blossoms that play so great and fine a part in the esthetic life of this extraordinary people. And here and there, at a window or over a balcony railing, could be seen a face — a quaint and girlish face with glossy black hair done up fantastically high over wide shell combs and with glimpses of flowered silks about slim shoulders. The fragrance of the early cherry and plum blossoms was in the air.

The famous "Number Nine" proved to be a large house at the end of the street. The door stood invitingly open. A well-trained servant

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

took my two boxes and the horn and carried them in. Another servant guided us upstairs.

The interior was cool and spacious. It differed in so many respects from photographs of typical Japanese house interiors that I decided it is really a foreign resort. Later inquiries this evening have confirmed this conclusion. In the actual Japanese house, the floor is elevated a foot or more and is also the seat; and in entering one passes first into a tiny hall on the street level, removes his shoes, then steps up to the floor proper. Here there was no such arrangement. We mounted steps, then walked through a broad hall that led into a central court full of flowers. The woodwork of floor and walls was of that characteristic and agreeable tan or natural shade. The rugs were simple and quiet in design and color.

Our guide led us to a stairway. The boy with my apparatus looked to me for instructions, and I motioned him to follow. Then we mounted the stairs, and passed along a broad corridor overlooking the court to an office-like room in the corner that was furnished with European tables and chairs. On the way we passed an open doorway, and I caught a passing glimpse of a dim, large room, in which the only furniture appeared to be a low platform covered with a rug of light red.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

"That's where the geisha girls dance," Crocker whispered.

I nodded. I was looking forward with a good deal of interest to hearing the music that accompanies this performance.

In the corner room we were welcomed very civilly by a little old woman, and tea was brought us. Then she said something to Crocker in a sort of pidgin-English which I did not quite catch. He nodded eagerly.

It occurred to me, with some bitterness I am afraid, that the little old woman would never have thought of turning to me as the leading spirit—never in the world. She hardly looked at me. So I went on sipping my tea.

A door opened, and in came a file of girls—fourteen of them. All were young; one, I thought, of not more than thirteen or fourteen years—though it is difficult for us of the West to judge accurately the age of Orientals. They shuffled along in their curious little shoes. Several seemed to me extremely pretty; all were small and dainty. Everything considered, they made a pleasing picture as they stood there, looking at us with a demure twinkling in each almond eye. I wondered what would come next. A dance, perhaps.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

Crocker had hitched forward in his chair and was looking rapidly from one end of the line to the other. His face was more flushed even than usual; his eyes were eager. Finally his gaze rested on the third girl from the right end of the line. I began to feel uncomfortable.

After a moment he rose, and nodded toward that third girl. She promptly stepped forward. "See you later, old man," he said to me briskly, hardly looking at me, and then, laying down a gold coin and taking the girl's arm, hurried from the room with her.

Left alone there, with the old woman and the thirteen girls, I found myself rather confused. It had not occurred to me that the business was to be rushed through with so mechanically, so brutally. The beauty of the building and the charm of these quaint little girls in soft-colored costumes had up to this moment held a strong lure for me. But suddenly the situation rang hard and metallic. It was, after all, just the problematic, age-old business in a new dress.

And then I began to feel ashamed. After all, most men are direct and practical in these puzzling matters. They do not theorize, they do not shrink from rough facts. They take life as they find it, and pass on. Here am I (so ran my

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

thoughts) drawing back, refusing life, and that not in any firmness of purpose, but in a sort of fright!

"I should like to see the geishas dance," I managed to say.

"No can do," replied the old woman, with a gesture of her skinny hands. "One day — three day — must tell." And she held up three fingers.

"I don't understand you," said I.

"Geisha girls no have got — must go catchee two, three, four piecee girl; two, three, four piecee music. Two — three day you tell. No can do."

She evidently meant that it was necessary to give notice if one wished the geisha dance. And she was grinning at me now and pointing to the girls. I was being swept along in this brutal business. Otherwise, they would feel, why had I come to take up their time?

I felt the color rushing into my face as I raised my hand and pointed at random. One of the girls came forward. The old woman held out her hand. I found a gold coin and dropped it on her palm; then turned for my apparatus, which the boy had set on a chair by the door. I made a rather awkward matter of picking it up, dropping the horn with a clatter. The other girls and the old woman were leaving the room and seemed not

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

to observe my confusion. The girl whom I had selected picked up the horn; then led the way out the door and along the corridor overlooking the wide court where the flowers were.

We entered a room, and she closed the door. My heart was palpitating, and I knew that my face was red; so I busied myself setting down the two boxes on the table and opening them.

I felt her brush against my arm, and looked at her. She was rather older than I had thought, though still young enough, God knows, for the pitiful trade she plies. And she was smiling, with what appeared to be genuine good humor. Probably I amused her. Worldly-wise women, when they observe me at all, usually look amused; so I make it a rule to avoid them when I can.

"Wha' ees eet?" she asked, nodding toward the instrument. She spoke in quite understandable English, though with a strong accent.

I told her it was a phonograph, and asked if she would sing into it. She seemed pleased.

I had her sing all the native songs she was able to think of at the moment, making notes of the title of each, as nearly as I could catch the sound of the words. To make sure that I had each correctly identified, I repeated it to her. She laughed a good deal over my attempts to pronounce

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

these titles. The seven songs that interested me I then requested her to sing into the phonograph. This she did, with only fair satisfaction to me; for she laughed a good deal, and would occasionally turn her head to look up at me, thus directing the tone away from the horn. I had to make her sing four of them twice. I regretted this, as four cylinders were thereby wasted, and I can not replace these specially made cylinders on this side the Pacific. I began to see that the twenty-two hundred I have brought with me will be used up pretty rapidly when my investigation gets under full headway on the farther side of the Yellow Sea.

I have, later to-night, played over these seven records here in my room at the hotel, with some sense of disappointment. One of them I think will prove, on careful analysis, to have for its basis the ancient pentatonic scale. The intervals of two are very nearly those of the oldest known Greek scales of a tone and two conjunct tetrachords. But in the case of the other four I shall be greatly surprised if they employ any other intervals than those of our own equal temperament scale of twelve semitones to the octave.

That, of course, is really the trouble with Japan as a field of research; these marvelous little people

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

pick up and assimilate Western ideas with such rapidity that their ancient traditions become hopelessly confused.

The girl seemed to tire after a while. Her voice became hoarse and she fell to coughing. I realized then that I had been holding her pretty closely to this work, and told her that she could rest a little while.

At this, she sat on the edge of the European bed, and looked at me, half smiling.

"You lig hear the *koto*?" she asked suddenly.

I nodded eagerly. The *koto*, as I have long known, is closely related to the ancient Chinese instrument, the *ch'in*, beloved of Confucius. Many investigators hold, indeed, that it is the same instrument, transplanted in the earliest times and changed a little in its new environment.

She slipped out of the room, and shortly returned with the instrument, which remotely resembles a modern zither — at least, in the fact that it has a number of strings (thirteen in this instance) stretched over a board and played by plucking with the fingers. It was a beautiful object, the *koto* of this nameless little inmate of the Yoshiwara, highly lacquered, with fine inlays of polished woods, tortoise-shell, ivory, and silver; and I could see by her smiling breathlessness and

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

the engaging, almost shy glances she gave me as she curled up on the bed to play it, that she was inordinately proud of it.

"You lig hear me pray?" she murmured.

The word "pray" came to me with a curious shock in this place. Then I remembered the Japanese confusion of our *r* and *l* sounds, and knew that she meant "play."

I nodded.

She drew from a fold of her dress a pitch-pipe contrived of six little bamboo tubes bound together by means of a copper wire, and tuned all the thirteen strings. Then she played for quite a long time, characteristic melodies of the Orient that floated vaguely and hauntingly between the major and the minor. I was able to get a fairly clear idea of the scale she used before I decided upon the nature of the records I wished to make of it. I moved a table over to the phonograph, and, by resting the *koto* on small boxes that I found on the bureau, I contrived to place it almost against the horn of the phonograph. Then I had her play, first the scale of the open strings, followed by those two or three of the melodies that had particularly interested me.

It had grown dark some time before this, and she had lighted a lamp. Now, feeling on the

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

whole well satisfied with the ten records I had made, I looked at my watch, and was astonished to learn that it was half-past eight in the evening. I at once set about packing up my apparatus.

She stood close to me, watching the process. Occasionally she put out her small hand and stroked my hair. When I had done, she came still closer and, with momentary hesitation, placed her arms about my neck.

"You go 'way?" she whispered.

"Yes," said I, "I must go now."

"You doan' lig me?"

"Why, yes, certainly," I replied, "I like you very much. And you have sung and played very prettily for me."

"Oh," said she, looking somewhat puzzled, "you lig that?"

I nodded. My hands had dropped naturally upon her shoulders. But I was conscious then—and, indeed, am to-night, as I write it down—of some confusion of thought.

Then she raised her face—by stretching up on tiptoe and pulling with tight little arms about my neck. I did not know what to do. To draw my lips away from hers would be something more than absurd. There is a limit even to what I suppose I must sooner or later admit as my own unmanli-

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

ness. So I kissed her, white man fashion. And, to my complete surprise, she clung to me with what seemed, for the moment, to be genuine emotion.

I will not attempt to explain either my nature in general or my actions at this particular time. What would be the use? I am writing this journal for my own eyes alone; and, God knows, hours enough of my life have been wasted in the pale avenues of introspection. I am not a wholly blc "ess being. And I know well enough that the average man buys women now and then, here and there, whatever obligation he may think himself under to conceal the fact and thereby contribute his support to the immense foundation lie on which our Anglo-Saxon structure of virtue and morality rests.

I do not know why I found myself unable to stay. Perhaps in another place and at another time it would have been different. Perhaps the beauty and charm of the house and the pleasant attractiveness of the little person herself had raised me too high above the ordinary sordid plane of this transaction, and emphasized the ugliness of it.

Perhaps, too, the fact (extraordinary in my lonely experience) that she had given up smiling

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

at me, and now plainly wanted me to stay, was among the curious psychological forces that drove me away. As to *why* she wanted me, I can not say. I have puzzled over that part of it all the evening (it is now a quarter to midnight) without arriving at any conclusion. It may be that by unconsciously permitting her, through my deep interest in her music, to show something of her own enthusiasms and of the emotions that stirred them, I had flattered her more subtly than I knew. Who can say?

I turned right back to my boxes. She called a boy to carry them, and I went away. My last glimpse, as I closed her door, was of a quaint little slant-eyed person, whose hair had become disarranged and was tumbling about her ears, whose lips were parted in a breathless smile.

One thing is sure: I shall never let Crocker know I came away like that. If he believed me at all, which I doubt, he would certainly think me weaker than I am. I may be a complicated, finicky person; but I do not believe I am as weak as he would think me if he knew.

As I was walking along the corridor I heard other footsteps, and looking across the dim, flower-scented court, just managed to distinguish a rather ponderous figure proceeding slowly among the

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

shadows on the other side. We met at the top of the stairs. It was Sir Robert.

I felt myself coloring furiously; and he wore a shamefaced expression. For such is the curious hypocrisy of man when caught in his more or less constant relationship with the one completely universal and unchangeable of his institutions.

"Well," said he, rather awkwardly, "it is a very pleasant place, the way they keep it up."

"Very," I replied.

"And what is all this?" He was looking at my boxes, in the arms of the boy at my elbow. "Purchases? Here?"

"That is my phonograph," I explained, quite unnecessarily.

"Your *what*?" He said this much as Crocker had said it.

"My phonograph," I repeated.

He stood looking at me, with knit brows. Then, "Ah, ha!" he said, musing. "So *that* was it! I could n't explain that music — hours of it — and the repetitions. I begin to see. You are the authority on Oriental music."

I bowed coldly.

Sir Robert began smiling — an old man's smile. I started down the stairs, but he kept at my side.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

We went on to the outer door together without a word, and waited while the boy called rickshaws for us. I looked at Sir Robert. He was still smiling.

"Let me congratulate you," he said then, rather dryly. And his left eyelid drooped in what was grotesquely like a wink. "You have the distinction, I believe, of being quite the most practical man in the world. You will go far."

Thank God, the rickshaw is the most unsociable of vehicles. Each of us stepped into his own and rolled away through a dim street bordered by rows of gay paper lanterns, which were lighted now.

As my rickshaw turned the corner, we nearly collided head on with another one. By the light of the lanterns I made out its occupant — the fat vaudeville manager from Cincinnati.

He waved a cheerful hand at me as we passed. "Number Nine?" he called.

"Number Nine," I replied. I felt depressed and ashamed; but he took it very easily.

I have, however, confirmed a conclusion tonight, so the experience has its value. I shall push on to China, where the ancient music may still be caught in its pure form, uncorrupted and unconfused by the modern touch. For my purposes,

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

time spent in Japan would be wasted. And I shall hurry past the treaty ports to Peking. The treaty ports, they tell me, are not really Chinese at all.

For that matter, how could they be?

*Grand Hotel, Yokohama,  
March 30th, Early Afternoon.*

CROCKER has not yet appeared. I borrowed his key from the office, just before lunch, and looked in his room. His bed had not been slept in. There is certainly no indirection about Crocker, no introspective uncertainty; he meets life as it presents itself, roughly and squarely.

On the whole, I find I like him much better than I expected. He is really a companionable chap. He is not so eager to tell his troubles as I had thought he would be. In fact, barring that one moment on the ship, he has not even referred to them; and I myself drew that out by telling him he was drinking too much.

Sir Robert came over and sat with me just now in the dining-room while I finished my lunch. I cut the meal as short as I could. He was distinctly affable. He asked point-blank where I am going, and I had to tell. It seems that he is bound for Peking also, *via* Shanghai and Nanking. Fortunately, he announced his route before asking about

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

mine. I decided on the spot to go around by the Korean and Chinese Imperial Railways, through Fusan, Mukden, and Shanhaikwan.

However, he perhaps did me a service by telling me of a pleasant little French hotel at Peking, on the Italian *glacis*, whatever that is. The big hotel in the Legation Quarter, he says, is rather expensive and at this time of year will be swarming with tourists. The little *Hôtel de Chine*, on the other hand, is frequented only by queer types of the Coast, and is really very cheap.

"The *cuisine*," said Sir Robert, "is atrocious. But, being French, they serve excellent coffee, which does for breakfast and one can, in a pinch, put together a fair luncheon there. For dinner, the *Wagon-lits*, of course. Above all, make no experiments with the cellar of the *Hôtel de Chine*. They will show you an imposing wine-card. Shun it!"

I merely bowed at this. It was no use telling Sir Robert that I should certainly not know one alleged vintage from another.

There is one difficulty. Sir Robert himself, affecting a taste for the quaint, will be stopping at our less pretentious hostelry; again, with my eyes closed at night, I shall see that bad old face with the one drooping eyelid; again that loose voice

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

will sound in my ears. But then, I shall be very busy.

Some one is knocking at my door. Crocker is calling.

*Midnight — Still the 30th.*

CROCKER was in the worst shape I have seen him in so far. His eyes were red. And when he dropped on my couch, the first thing he did was to stretch out his right hand and watch it critically. It was decidedly unsteady.

"Ring up a boy, old chap, will you?" he said. I did so. He ordered a quart bottle of whisky and a half-dozen bottles of *Tan San*.

"Steady my nerves," he observed, half to himself. "It's that dam' *saké*. Gets to me like absinthe." He chuckled. "I must have a quart of the stuff in me. Some night, my boy!"

Curiously, a few drinks of the whisky did seem to steady his nerves. After a while he came over to the table, sat down opposite me, and lighted a cigar. We talked for an hour or two — until I finally explained that I really had to get at my work. Then he returned to the sofa, stretched out comfortably, with the whisky and an ash-tray on a chair beside him, and watched me, with only an occasional good-natured interruption.

He seemed greatly interested in my method of.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

musical notation. Of course, the ordinary staff of five lines would not serve me at all, since I find it necessary to indicate intervals much closer than the usual half-step. I use large sheets of paper, ruled from top to bottom with fine lines, every sixteenth line being heavier. Thus I can record intervals as fine as the sixteenth of a tone. In fact, as I told Crocker, and as Rameau and von Stumbostel both recognize, *I have actually done so!* I undoubtedly possess the most delicate aural perception of any scientist that has ever investigated the so-called primitive music. My ears are to me what the eyes of the great astronomer are to him. This is why all my contemporaries, particularly the great von Stumbostel, are following my present inquiry with such extraordinary interest.

It was six o'clock before I finished noting down the songs and *koto* melodies from my records of the preceding evening. Crocker sipped continuously at his whisky and *Tan San* — to my surprise, without the slightest apparent ill effect. Perhaps he grew a little mellower, a little more human, as the phrase runs, but that was all. When my work was done, I drew a chair to the sofa, put my feet up, and encouraged him to talk.

At a little after seven he went to his room to

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

dress for dinner. I scrubbed some of the ink off my fingers and slipped into my dinner-jacket, then knocked at his door.

As we descended the wide stairs, I observed that Crocker was walking down very rigidly, placing his foot squarely in the middle of each step. On the landing he paused, and turned to me with a slight smile.

"Am I acting all right?" he asked.

"Perfectly. Why?"

"My boy,"—he lowered his voice,—"I'm drunk as a lord. But I reckon I can get away with it. Come along."

He really handled himself surprisingly well. I am not an expert, of course, in the various psychological reactions from drink. I should have said he was a little over-stimulated, nothing more. He kept away from the bar, and at the table in the big dining-room drank very little—only a cocktail and a light wine with the roast. And he discussed this with me at the start, finally deciding that it would not be wise for him to stop abruptly.

All went well until the dessert. There was quite a choice of items on the bill. I ordered vanilla ice cream. I distinctly heard him order the same. I recall wondering a little, at the mo-

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

ment; for surely vanilla ice cream was not the most desirable addition to the various substances already on his alcohol-poisoned stomach.

When the waiter set the dish before him, he astonished me with a sudden outburst of anger.

"Good God!" he cried, quite loud, "am I to be treated like this! Has nobody any regard for my feelings!"

I began to feel unpleasantly conspicuous.

"This is past all endurance!" he shouted, pushing back his chair.

The Chinese waiter had turned back, by this time, and stood, bowing respectfully by his chair.

Crocker swore under his breath, sprang to his feet, and with a short, hard swing of his right hand struck the unsuspecting Chinaman on the jaw.

I never before saw a man fall in precisely that way. Indeed, it was not a fall in the ordinary sense of the word. It was more like a sudden paralysis. His knees appeared to give, and he sank to the floor without the slightest sound that I was conscious of.

There was a good deal of confusion, of course. Women made sounds. One or two, I think, ran from the room. There was much scraping of

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

chairs as men got up and made for us. The manager of the hotel appeared, crowding through toward us.

The Chinaman did not stir; he was now merely a heap of blue clothing at our feet, huddled against the table-leg.

Crocker stood beside the table, steadyng himself by gripping the back of his chair, and smiling with an air of rather self-conscious distinction. He bowed slightly to the breathless manager.

"It was quite unavoidable," he said. "As a gentleman you will readily see that." His tongue was thicker now. "Nobody regrets it more 'n I — nobody more 'n I."

The manager gave me a look and caught him by one arm. I took the other. Crocker hung back.

"This is quite unnecessary," he said, "quite unnecessary. I'm perf'kly sober, I assure you. As a matter o' fac', I'm soberes' man in th'ole big room. Very big room. Ver' big room indeed. Bigges' room ever saw."

Between us, the manager and I got him upstairs and into his room. Then I was left alone with him to undress him and get him into his bed. The task consumed all of an hour. He was rough, almost violent, one moment, and absurdly



"It was quite unavoidable," he said



## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

pc'ite the next. His mind developed a trick of leaping off on unexpected tangents. He tried to point out reasons against removing each article of clothing as we came to it. It was interesting, on the whole. I have since almost regretted that I did not make exact notes of these curious mental flights. But at the moment it seemed too remote from my own field of study. And I suppose my decision was reasonable.

It occurs to me, in glancing back over the foregoing paragraph, that Crocker — had I been the drunk one and he the sober — would not have drifted into this highly self-conscious theorizing; he would not have felt this detachment from the fact. Perhaps that is the secret of my difference from other men. Perhaps that is the peculiar respect in which I am not wholly normal. If this is so, am I doomed to dwell always apart from my fellows in a cold region of pure thought? I am going to set this confession down here: I have almost envied Crocker to-night — not, of course, the frightful things he does, but the human, yes, the animal quality of the man that makes it possible for him to get drunk now and then. *For I can't do it!* I am farther from the norm than he; on the opposite side, to be sure, but farther. Is not this why I have never had a man chum?

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

Is not this why no good woman has ever looked on me with the eye of love?

I got him to bed, finally, and sat by him until he fell asleep. I am going back there now to pass the night on his sofa, first undressing here. I shall feel somewhat conspicuous, walking down the hall in the gay kimono I bought this morning. But I do not think any one will notice it. They seem not to mind such things out here.

The manager has just been up to see me. He says that the waiter is all right now, excepting a slight nausea. And he suggests that Crocker leave the hotel as soon as convenient. Poor fellow, I shall have to carry this word to him. I found, on pinning the manager down, that by the phrase "as soon as convenient" he means as early to-morrow as possible. But I shall not wake Crocker up; he shall have his sleep before they turn him out on the Bund.

Well, I must get ready now for my night watch. It is the first time I have ever been responsible for a drunken man.

To-morrow I leave over the Tokaido Railway for the Straits of Tsushima, Korea, Manchuria, and the barbaric old capital of the newest republic on earth. It has been a curious experience throughout, this with Crocker. But it will soon

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

be over now. And I do not regret it. I may never again be drawn so deeply into the rough current of actual life. My way lies far from this.

*On the Railway,  
Coasting the Island Sea —  
March 31st.*

CROCKER'S story came out, after all. This morning, in his room. It is rather difficult writing here on the train, with only a suit-case for a table; but I feel that I must set down the last of this strange story, now that I have given so much of my time and thought to the man; and it must be written before any new experiences may arise to claim my attention and perhaps erase some salient detail of the narrative. Then, who knows? This may not be the last. I may find myself involved in it again. Sir Robert observed yesterday: "The China Coast is even smaller than the well-known world. Even if I should miss you at Peking, we shall meet again." He is doubtless right. We shall meet again. And Crocker and I, too, shall meet again, I think. When and how, I can only wonder.

I slept badly last night, on his sofa. Early this morning I returned to my own room, dressed, ordered up a light breakfast, and then spent two

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

hours in packing. It was nearer eleven than ten when I tapped on the door.

"Come in!" he called.

He had pulled an extra pillow in behind his head, and was sitting up in bed. He was whiter than I had before seen him. And the hand that he extended to me shook so that he could hardly hold it up. It was cold to the touch.

For a few moments after I had sent a boy for his coffee, we talked about next to nothing — the time, the weather, my departure. But his hollow eyes were searching me.

"Who put me here?" he asked, finally.  
I told him.

"Any trouble?"  
I hesitated.

"Tell me. Don't play with me. Did I break out?"

There was nothing to do but tell him the whole story; which I did. He listened in complete silence, sipping the coffee (for which he seemed to feel some repugnance).

"Hurt the fellow?" he asked, when I had done.

"No. He is reported all right this morning." His chin dropped on his deep chest. He seemed to be meditating, in a crestfallen sort of way; but

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

I observed that his eyes wandered aimlessly about the room. Finally he said:

“Suppose I had killed him.”

“You did n’t,” I replied shortly.

He covered his face with his shaking hands.

“It’s the murder in my heart,” he muttered. I could only look at him.

After a little he dropped his hands, leaned back on the pillow, and gazed at me.

“You’re blaming me,” he said.

I shook my head.

“You are. But not so much as you will. Do you know what I’m doing out here? Do you suppose I left my business to come halfway around the world on a pleasure trip — at my age? Chuck everything worth while, just when I’m at the top of my stride? No, you don’t know; but I’m going to tell you.”

I put up my hand, but he plunged gloomily on:

“My wife eloped with a man. A man I knew. They came out here. I’ve come to find them. I’m going to kill him and her. With a knife.”

“You must not do that,” said I. I recall now that the thought came to me to deal with him as if he were a lunatic, and humor him. So I said, “You must not do that.”

“It is the only thing to do,” said he, rather

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

dogmatically. "How can I face my friends again if I fail? A man who does n't even try to protect his home!"

"It would be murder."

He shook his head. "No honest jury would hang me for that. It is the unwritten law." Then, as if conscious of the weakness of his argument, he added: "Besides, what difference does it make? Those two have committed worse than murder against me. It does n't matter a particle now what becomes of me. I loved my wife. I gave her everything that money could buy. I bought her an automobile for her own only last year. I took her to Europe. And when I married her she had never had anything or been anywhere. I wanted her to be the mistress of my home, and she insisted on sacrificing all that—and me—to her music. So I got her the best teachers in New York and Paris. Even left her in Paris to study. That's where she met him. She insisted on going into opera. I forbade that—naturally. I wanted children—she refused. Tell me—is that asking too much?"

He had been talking in a monotonous tone; but now his voice began rising, and his face was twitching nervously.

"Is it?" he went on. "Is it asking too much

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

for a husband to have sons to bear his name and inherit his property? When I saw what was going on, she told me to divorce her. I said, 'By God, that's one thing I won't do for you! I've some sense of honor, if you have n't! You're mine, and you stay mine!' Then she ran away with that crook. But she can't have him, I tell you! She can't have him!"

I suggested that he lower his voice. He gave me a curious, wild glance, and fell silent.

It occurred to me that, knowing all this, I had no right to go away — that I must stay and prevent this terrible thing from taking place. I said as much to him.

"No," he replied, with some vehemence; "there's nothing in that. You couldn't prevent anything. The best thing you can do is to run along. I don't even know where they are; but I'll find them. You can't hide long on the China Coast — not from a man that's really looking."

I thought this over for quite a little time. It was true enough that I could not prevent his giving me the slip. I could not lock him up or detain him in any forcible way. It seemed to me that I must do something; but as the moments passed it grew increasingly difficult to imagine what it could be.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

It was all very disturbing. I helped him get up. Then, as he seemed fairly well able to dress himself, I went out and walked for a while on the Bund. When I returned I found him stretched out on my sofa, smoking.

"Come on in," he said in a strong, sober voice. What an extraordinary fund of vitality the man has to draw on! "I want to talk to you."

As I sank into a chair beside him, I felt once more that he was the stronger of us, I the weaker, even after all we had been through.

He knocked the ash off his cigar. It missed the ash-tray and fell, part of it, on the leg of my trousers. "I beg your pardon, old man," he said, and carefully brushed it off. Then he settled back against the wall and stared up through his smoke at the pattern on the ceiling.

"My hand is n't quite steady yet," he added calmly.

Then he went on: "I should n't have told this to you, Eckhart. It is n't the sort of thing a man can tell. But, as it happens, you know why I did it. I 've been stewed to the brim for two days. I 'm through with that now, though. Until a certain job is done, I touch nothing stronger than wine. Here 's my hand on it."

I had to clear my throat. I managed to say

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

huskily: "I can't take your hand on that, Crocker."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Very well," he said. "If you prefer it that way. It goes, however. I drink no more now. That is one thing I really have you to thank for, Eckhart. Until you spoke out, back there on the ship, I didn't realize how much I was drinking. What you told me this morning has clinched the business. I'm through. And you will find that I am a man of my word."

"I am glad of that," said I, "because I believe that, with the drink out of your system, your philosophy of life will change. I hope it will."

He shook his head at this.

"No, Eckhart. Now, see here. You have today seen deep into a man's heart. What you saw was not drink, merely; it was fact."

His manner of saying this gave me an uncomfortable feeling that he was speaking the truth. Indeed, my increasing conviction as to the great reserve power of the man was distressing me.

"As I told you this morning," he went on, "there is absolutely nothing you can do in the matter. Except killing me, of course — you could do that. But you won't."

"No," said I sadly; "I won't."

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

"And I'm going to ask you to take the only course that an honorable man can take in the private quarrel of another — stand aside and try to forget what I have told you. You have my drunken confidences; forget them."

"See here!" I broke out. "Were you faithful to your wife before she turned against you?"

His eyes hardened. "What do you mean by that?" he asked.

"Precisely what I say."

"You're talking nonsense, Eckhart —"

"I am *not* talking non —"

"Yes, you are!"

He had swung around, and was sitting up, looking me squarely in the eye, as he shouted me down. My heart sank. Mere squabbling would get us nowhere. I did not know what to do. I do not now know what to do.

He went on:

"Yes; I was, to all intents and purposes, faithful to her. I did as well as a normal, healthy man can be expected to do. Let us not be childish about this. You and I know that man is physiologically different from woman. We know that what there is of purity and sacredness in marriage and in life will be lost forever once we lower our ideal of woman's virtue."

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

"No," said I; "as a scientific man—"

I could not go on with my protest; for thoughts of a few wild moments in my own relatively quiet life had come floating to the surface of memory. Who was I, to oppose the double standard of morality that has ruled the world so long!

He was still looking at me in that intent way. There was deep sadness behind the hard surface of his eyes.

"I came here to thank you for all your kindness, Eckhart," he said then. "As for what you have heard, remember it is mine, not yours. That is all. Now, if you don't mind, I'll help you get your truck down to the train."

I did as he said. I am on my way to Peking to pursue my research. He is plunging off to scour the ports of Japan, all the way to Nagasaki, for the man and the woman who have assailed his honor and (what I am tempted to think even more to the point) outraged his pride as the head of his own house. Then he will go on, if necessary, to Shanghai,—that port of all the world,—to Hong-kong, Manila, and Singapore, perhaps up the coast to Tientsin and Peking. And he has made me believe that he will do as he has sworn. It is very strange — very sad.

At the station I made my last weak protest.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

"Crocker," I blurted out, "for God's sake, try to win her back. Perhaps you drove her away. Perhaps you were harsher, less understanding, than you knew. Perhaps you should beg her forgiveness, not she yours."

He shook his head. "That may be so," he said. "All that you say may be so. But I could n't take her back. Don't you see?"

"No," I replied stoutly, "I don't see."

He raised both his hands in a despairing gesture.

"She is — she —" His voice suddenly failed him. "She's a woman — and she's soiled!" His eyes filled; a tear rolled down his cheek. He made a queer, convulsive face; then threw up his hands and turned away.

That was all. I boarded my train.

The young German did not return the fifteen dollars. This China Coast is a hive of swindlers — so says Sir Robert. Henceforth I intend hardening my heart against every man. And against every woman, above all. For they, says Sir Robert, are the subtler and the worse.

*Peking, April 5th, Midday.*

**T**HAT Crocker affair haunts me with the power of a bad dream.

I do not like this at all.

I was too sympathetic with that man. I opened the gates of my mind to his ugly story; now I can not thrust it out and close those gates. My first impulse, to hold him at arm's length, was sound. I should have done that. But at least, and at no small cost, I have again learned my little lesson; from now on I purpose dwelling apart from the tangle of contemporary life. It has no bearing on my work, on my thoughts. None whatever. It merely confuses me.

Yet, through momentary weakness, I have permitted my precious line of pure thought to be clouded with the vision of a strong man's face with tears on it. I see it at night. And, worse, I can not stop myself from hunting for the woman he is going to kill. The mere sight of a youngish couple sets my pulse to racing. I watch — on trains, in station crowds, on the street — for a beautiful woman with a sad face. That she will

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

be beautiful I am certain; for Crocker would have had nothing less in that house of which he felt himself so strongly and dominantly the master. And I think she will be sad.

I study the throats of the beautiful young women I see. She will have the full, rather broad throat of the singer. And the deep chest and erect bearing. And I think her head will be well poised.

There is a woman here in the hotel — a particular woman, I mean — on this second floor. Though, for that matter, there are only the two floors. I have passed her twice, in the hall. But the light is dim, and I have been unable to observe her throat or her face. She is of a good height, for a woman, — quite as tall as I, — and she steps firmly on the balls of her feet. Her figure is slim. The chest, I think, is deep. And in a way that I, as a man (and a man who knows little of woman outside the psychology books), can not explain in any satisfactory way, she conveys, even in this dim light, the impression of being exquisitely dressed.

I think she has her meals served in her room. At least, I have on three occasions met a waiter coming upstairs with a tray; and I can not make out that it would be for any other.

As Sir Robert intimated, these other guests are

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

a queer lot. There can not be more than twelve or fourteen, in all. The men are seedy, and rather silent. They sit about a good deal, reading the papers (copies of the more suggestive French weeklies are strewn about on every chair and sofa in the lounge), and they eye me and one another with a sort of cool distrust. The women, three or four in all, seem to come and go rather freely. And each has the eye, the manner, even the physical bearing, of the woman for whom the half-world has no secrets. Then, there is a discreet, drifting class of transients — men from the Legation Quarter, I believe (often, indeed, they come in full uniform), who are always accompanied by young women. Sometimes, as it may happen, these are the familiar women of the place; but quite as often they are strangers to my eyes. And always, day and night, there is in the manner of the guests and in that of the little French manager and his half-caste clerk an air of carefully refraining from questions. It is as if every one said to every one else: "You are here, but you are quite safe, for I make it a rule never to see who comes or what goes on here. Perhaps one day I may have to ask the same discreet courtesy from you. It is quite all right, believe me."

In this odd atmosphere I live and have my

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

being. The building is a mere rambling collection of *mansardes*. The chairs in the bedrooms — at least, in my own — are of the common bent-iron variety usually seen in gardens. The beds are of the most simple iron sort, once painted with a white enamel that has been largely chipped off. The linen is threadbare, even ragged, — there is a hole in my nether sheet through which my foot slips at night, not infrequently catching there and waking me from dreams of the pillory and chains, — but it is not unclean. There would be no excuse for that, in a whole world of laundrymen. On each mantel and iron-legged table is an ash-tray that blatantly advertises a Japanese whisky.

Yes, in this odd atmosphere I live and, in a manner, breathe — I and the slim, beautifully dressed woman who walks so firmly on the balls of her feet. Whoever she may be, she belongs here no more than I.

Of course, the chances are all against — yet I wonder! For one thing, she is alone. I am positive of this. All the other guests I have seen, now, coming and going. But she never comes or goes — excepting apparently for a short walk each afternoon, and always unaccompanied. He would not have deserted her — away out here. Surely a

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

man would not do that to a woman he has loved.

But wait—I am forgetting the sort of world this is. There is nothing—nothing—man does not do to woman. Or that woman does not do to man. Nothing is too subtly selfish, nothing too cruel.

To-day I mean to time my own walk with hers. I must see her in the light. I must observe her throat and her face. . . . At the thought of what I may see my nerves behave abominably. My forehead burns. My heart beats with an absurd irregularity. These facts alone appear to indicate that my place is not in this wild world of passion and conflict.

It is not wholly unpleasant here in my dingy little room—though the carpet is a rag, and the door between me and my next neighbor has shrunk its lock out of alignment and appears to be blocked off, on the farther side, by some bulky piece of furniture. This door opens on my side of the partition.

No, it is not so unpleasant. Outside, the sun is shining. To my nostrils comes floating the quaint, pungent odor that has in the minds of so many travelers characterized the East. Over the low-tiled roofs of a row of Chinese houses I can see—beyond an open space—the masonry wall

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

of the fortified Legation Quarter, with a sentry-box peeping above it, and the flag of Italy, and trees.

April 5th — night.

IT is she.

This afternoon I was revising my notation of the Japanese music; quite late, five o'clock or so. Suddenly I heard a voice — a woman's voice — singing very softly, in the next room, beyond that shrunken door and the bulky piece of furniture. It is a bureau, I think, with a mirror above it that is nearly as high as the door.

She was singing "*Aus Meinen Grossen Schmerzen*" of Robert Franz, that saddest and most exquisite of German *lieder*. The voice is a full, even soprano. It is a big voice, I am sure, though she sang so softly. The impression I received was that she was carefully holding it down to a *pianissimo*. It is, I should say, a remarkable organ. Even in her softest voice there is what the great singers call an "edge" — that firm, fine resonance that will send the lightest thread of tone floating out over all the volume of sound of a full orchestra.

She sang the little song with a tone color of poignant sadness — as if her heart were throbbing

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

with all the sorrow of the world, and yet as if she could not keep from singing. She has plainly studied much. The impulse to sing and the habit of singing are strong within her.

But the voice, so beautiful and under such fine control, was not what suddenly caused me to leap up from my chair and tiptoe to that rather useless door, and then to turn to my kit-bag and fumble wildly for my tuning-fork. No; what excited me — for it did excite me out of all reason — was her sense of pitch. The mezzo-soprano or baritone transposition of that Franz song is in the key of *f*-major, ending in *d*-minor. I stood by her door, the *c*-fork resting lightly against my teeth, waiting for that lovely voice to descend the final minor third, linger, tenderly and sadly, on the *d*. Then I bit the fork. She was singing a perfect *d*. Certainly there was no piano in any of these miserable little rooms. And she had employed no other instrument; she had simply and naturally broken into song because she could not help singing. *She has absolute pitch!*

The great regret of my life is that my own sense of pitch is not absolute. It is very nearly but not quite perfect, despite my extremely delicate ear for close intervals. Yet this young woman, who to my own knowledge has not sung a note for

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

several days, and who can not conceivably have heard any Occidental music whatever, breaks into song, and casually and unconsciously employs the correct pitch to the twentieth part of a tone.

My first thought was that it might be an accident. So I waited, tuning-fork in hand.

Having begun to sing, of course she could not stop. I am thinking now that probably it was the first time she had released her voice for a considerable period, and that at last she simply could not help making use of what was the natural outlet for her emotions.

She next hummed a few bars of "*Im Herbst*," also by Franz. Evidently she is fond of the work of this fine lyric composer. This is in the key of c-minor. Again I tested her with my tuning-fork, and again she was correct to the minutest shade of a tone. Her voice had leaped the interval between the two keys apparently without a conscious thought on her own part.

This second song perhaps failed as a vehicle for her mood; at any rate, she stopped it abruptly, and was silent for a time. Standing there close to the door, I could hear her moving about with light, restless feet. Myself, I held my breath at moments. Then the sound of her footsteps ceased, and there was a sudden creaking sound, as if she

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

had thrown herself upon the bed. But still I waited, breathless, balancing there with my left hand against the door-frame, the right clutching the tuning-fork. I was sure she would sing again.

She did. But it must have been after quite a long time, for I realized afterward that my feet ached and that the arm I held up against the door frame had, as we say, gone to sleep.

Finally there came another creaking. She was getting up. Doubtless she was quite too restless to lie down long. Again I heard the quick, light sound of her feet moving about the room. Then the voice again. And again it was that saddest and most exquisite of songs.

*"Aus meinen grossen Schmerzen  
Mach', ich die kleine Lieder . . ."*

she sang, very low. I felt nearly certain that she had slipped naturally back into the key of *f*-major, but not absolutely certain.

It was disturbing, this partial uncertainty on my part. No person in the world — not a single living being — has quite so great a need for absolute pitch as I. With that, coupled with my ear for intervals, I would stand as the one scholar perfectly equipped for my own line of investigation. As it is, I am not unlike an astronomer with en-

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

thusiasm, exhaustive knowledge, a fine mathematical brain, and a marvelous seeing eye, but with a very slight — oh, very slight — touch of color-blindness. And I never before missed this one attribute quite so keenly as I miss it now, out here on the ground for the great first-hand investigation of my whole life.

So at last I had to give up my effort to place precisely the key in which she was singing, and sound the fork. As I supposed, she was right again. There was no doubt now. Not the slightest. As I have already written down, she has it — a sheer, prodigal gift of nature. And, of course, it is of no particular value to her. She is not even, at present, a professional singer; and, if she were, she could do very well without this precise gift. . . . I have supposed for years that I had a philosophy. I long ago realized that to waste time and tissue in concerning myself with the one defect in my equipment would be simply by that much to impair my actual effectiveness. But to-day my philosophy failed me, as I thought of that sad little woman who has what I lack, and who does not need it. I even had a wild notion of knocking on the door and making myself known to her.

As for what actually did follow, I think I will

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

try to set down just as simply and naturally as I can, reconstructing the curious scene more or less coolly as I recall it now, with my excitement spent and my mind reasonably steady. That is surely the best way, in the case of such an extraordinary occurrence — just write it down and let it go at that.

She was silent for a little time, perhaps standing at her dresser. I wonder if it is like mine, a rickety chest of drawers, sadly in need of paint, with a narrow mirror above it. My mirror is broken in the right-hand lower corner; and at that point I see, instead of the reflection of the dingy room, only an irregular triangle of pine backing. I should like to think that hers is at least a little fresher and brighter, and that the mirror is not broken. These things mean a great deal to a woman, I think. I might have observed all this for myself, doubtless; but at the moment I was too full of the thrill of my discovery to indulge in a single personal thought.

I was still standing there by the door, my left hand quite numb, my feet a little cold from remaining motionless so long, when she began lightly to run over those remarkable exercises of hers.

She began by striking octaves. Her voice flew ever so lightly, yet firmly and surely, from lower

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

*a* to middle *a* to upper *a*. Then the two octaves of *a*-sharp. Then *b*. And so on, until she was touching, in that same light, sure way, the *d*-sharp above high *c*.

Next she sang an ordinary chromatic scale, no differently from the performance of other singers I have heard excepting perhaps for the remarkable evenness and firmness and pure, floating quality of her *pianissimo* tone. It was after all this that the remarkable gift that amazed me came to light.

She returned to singing octaves. Only, as if testing and trying her own precision of pitch, she began striking the upper octave note, in making the leap from the lower to the higher, first correctly according to the accepted tempered scale of the Western world, then a fraction of a tone flat, then a fraction of a tone sharp, then back to the normal octave. She played with these fractional tones as easily and surely as the ordinary good singer plays with mere semitones. She actually took them in succession, quite as easily as she had, a little earlier, taken the semitones of the chromatic scale.

This was too much. I could not stand still any longer. In all my experience I had never found a white person with anything approaching my fineness of ear in merely hearing close intervals.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

But I can not sing them as I hear and know them. I have no voice at all; my vocal chords will not obey my will with any degree of precision. Yet here, in this queer, rather unpleasant little French hotel in the great, barbaric city of Peking, in the next room to mine, is an American woman who can actually sing the intervals that I can only hear.

I knocked on the door.

There was instant and utter silence in the next room.

I knocked again.

She must have been holding her breath. I could not hear so much as the rustle of her skirt.

I spoke, in what I suppose was an excited whisper.

"Please let me speak with you," I said.  
"Please let me speak with you!"

Still no sound.

Then it was that I opened the door — the shrunken door that would not lock.

*Hôtel de Chine, Peking, April 5th — or 6th.*

**T**IS sometime in the very early morning. Peking is still. Even in this rookery of night birds every light is out but mine. I had to stop writing a while back and go for a long hard walk — around the Legation Quarter, outside the walls. But now I shall force myself to write down the rest of it. I shall not go to bed until it is done. It is too absurd that a scientist of proved ability and of highly trained will power should be overcome by his emotions in this way.

I have just tiptoed to the shrunken door that so inadequately separates her room from mine. I heard her irregular breathing; and, while I stood there, caught a low jumble of words spoken with the thick tongue of the sleeper.

And she stirs restlessly in her bed. Even from my chair I can hear that.

But I must tell what happened this afternoon.

I opened her door. I was quite beside myself. Behind it, not quite blocking off the opening, the unpainted, dusty back of her bureau confronted

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

me. I looked through the narrow space between the mirror post and the door frame, and saw her.

She was standing by the foot of the bed.

I laid hands on the creaky old bureau and moved it aside. It was heavy, and it had no castors. I had to exert all my strength, tugging and pushing at it. Then I had to wait a moment to recover my breath.

She was standing rigidly, very white, holding with one hand to the bent iron tube over the foot of the little bed. She has long, slender fingers.

She never moved. Her wide eyes were fixed on me.

The sweat was breaking out on my forehead. A drop fell on the right lens of my spectacles. I took them off and fumbled for my handkerchief. Then I said —

“ You have absolute pitch! ”

She did not move or speak.

“ But that is not all,” I went on, more rapidly. “ You have the finest sense of intervals of any one in the world. Excepting myself.”

Her eyes narrowed a very little. And she glanced toward the other door, the one that led into the hall. It seemed to me that her tense muscles relaxed somewhat.

But when I had put on my spectacles and, now



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



1.8

1.6



APPLIED IMAGE Inc

1653 East Main Street  
Rochester, New York 14609 USA  
(716) 482-0300 - Phone  
(716) 288-5989 - Fax

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

quite myself, came forward into the room, she swung back a step and flashed her eyes on me again. And I saw her fingers tighten around the iron tube at the foot of the bed.

This would n't do. I had frightened her dreadfully. Of course she could n't possibly know how mistaken she was in this. The thing to do was to explain everything to her.

"My name is Eckhart, Anthony Ives Eckhart," I began; then paused, thinking that she, being a musical person, might have heard the name. But there was no light of recognition in her eyes.

"You can not imagine what it means to me to find you," I went on. It seemed to me that from moment to moment she was on the point of interrupting me, so I talked very rapidly, trying at the same time to make my voice and manner as easy and matter-of-fact as possible.

"I have come all the way to China to make phonographic records of Chinese music. I shall make at least two thousand such records, and when I have finished my work will be recognized as the one great contribution to the study of the Oriental tone sense. For I shall secure and preserve on my cylinders the primitive scale intervals that underlie all natural musical expression."

For some reason this explanation did not seem

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

to get me anywhere. Excepting that now she looked bewildered as well as frightened. But I could not retreat. For here before me was a woman who had the great gift and who could understand. At this thought my mind began racing excitedly ahead. I thought of what she could do for me. And it was so absurdly simple, so little to ask! My forehead was burning now, and the hand that pressed the handkerchief against it was shaking perceptibly. It was a great moment — the greatest, perhaps, in my life.

“God has sent you to me!” I cried, my voice rising and becoming shrill. “I *must* make you understand!”

She was glancing again toward the hall door. I could n’t make her out at all. But I lowered my voice.

“I *must* make you understand,” I repeated. “To-day, at the very beginning of my work, I find you. I need you more than anything else in the world — and right now. Yet an hour ago I did not know you existed. It is unbelievable. It is a miracle! I must have a phonographic record of a close-interval scale. For years I have dreamed of securing one. I myself can hear the closest intervals, but I can not sing them. Now you — you — shall sing this scale for me — not

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

the artificial half-tones of our barbarous piano keyboard, but quarter-tones, even eighth-tones. With such a scale, the sounds recorded unerringly on a cylinder from which they can be reproduced at will, we shall at last have an absolute standard for the comparison of all tones and scales. Tell me"— I was trembling with eagerness — "do you think you could sing eighth-tones? *Do* you think you could?"

She just stood there.

"But you must do this!" I cried. "You have no right to withhold such a gift! God has sent you to me, and I shall use you. It will take a little time, but we shall practise, practise, practise! There will be failures, but we shall be patient. My life work is to be a true science at last. They can no longer say that it depends on the caprice of a single human ear. They shall now hear for themselves, they shall make their own comparisons, working with our absolute phonographic scale. Who knows, perhaps we shall yet make the final perfect scale of eighty-one distinct notes to the octave. No voice has yet done that. And no violin. For no living performer has the delicacy of ear and muscle."

I began chuckling excitedly at this thought. I admit that my condition bordered on hysteria; but

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

has not a man the right to be very slightly hysterical in the great moment of his life?

"We shall make many records," I said to her, mopping my wet forehead. "Von Stumbostel shall have one, in Berlin—and Boag. Ramel and Fourmont shall have them, at Paris. And de Musseau, at the Sorbonne. And Sir Frederick Rhodes, at Cambridge. The new scale record shall be the basis of volume six—on "True Intervals and Natural Song." One copy I shall seal in a metal tube for preservation at the British Museum, together with my other records. And—yes, I shall send one to that miserable little von Westfall, of Bonn. I shall silence him. I shall crush him. It will amuse me to do that."

I stopped, all glowing.

She looked at me until her lids drooped, and I could see her long lashes against the whiteness of her skin.

She fell back a step, hesitating, and shrinking a little, still clinging to the foot of the bed, and made a listless gesture with her left hand.

"You have broken into my room," she said, steadily enough, but very low.

Women are lit-

But it was so. I had done just that. Doubtless it was an outrageous thing to do; but it had not

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

seemed outrageous. It had come about quite naturally.

Still, she confused me. I had been talking volubly; now, all of a sudden, I could not speak at all. For the first time I fully realized how pale she was. And she looked tired about the eyes, where nervous exhaustion always shows first. It occurred to me, too, that her eyes were very blue and distinctly beautiful. I never saw longer lashes.

So I stood stupidly there, looking at her. I had flown too high. Now my spirits were dropping fast into a pit of depression. She suddenly appeared to me as a helpless, pitiful creature. God knows there was little enough privacy for her in this shabby hotel with its thin partitions and its ill-fitting doors and its drifting, dubious class of guests; and what little privacy she had I had violated. I looked at the dilapidated bureau that had stood across our common door. It had taken all my strength to push it aside. I wondered if she herself had moved it there. What a pitiful effort, if she had, to shield her tired, hunted soul from intrusion!

"Will you please go!" she breathed.

I am afraid this nettled me a little. At least, my coming in that wild way had not been a per-

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

sonal matter. I had tried to make that much plain to her. Then why make it so personal! But that, of course, is the woman of it. And God knows I was wrong — all wrong.

“Will you please go!” she breathed again.

I bowed and turned to the door. But then it occurred to me as likely that I would no more than get my door closed before she would be in a frantic hurry to move the bureau back. And that bureau was too heavy for her, or for any woman. It was almost too heavy for me.

So I stepped back into her room and began tugging at the bureau again. When I saw the fresh concern on her face, I nodded toward the hall door and said, “I’ll go out that way.”

She understood this. She even came over and watched me as I worked at the thing. It would n’t move. Having no castors, the feet had caught in the matting. I went to the other end and pushed, but only succeeded in tipping it up, and spilling several articles to the floor. I let the bureau drop, and went down on my knees to pick them up. There was a hair brush and a nail buffer, both with heavy silver backs bearing the initials “H. C.” Then there was a small bottle with a glass stopper that came out and let the contents of the bottle run over the matting. And

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

there was a wide tortoise-shell comb, of the sort that you pick up at Nagasaki.

I put all these things back on the bureau, and pushed again. She stood beside me in apparent hesitation, then, as if on an impulse, caught hold and pulled with me. But it was no use. The matting was by this time hopelessly wrinkled up about the feet. And after a moment of this we both stepped back and looked at it. I simply had to stop anyway and mop off my forehead and wipe my spectacles. I was all out of breath.

Then, after a moment, I took off my coat and dropped it on a chair.

"If you don't mind helping once more," I began —

She inclined her head.

"— I 'll have to lift it over those wrinkles."

So I caught hold and lifted with all my strength. She went around to the other side and threw her weight against it. Together we finally got it back squarely across the doorway.

"I 've made you a great deal of trouble," I said, "and I 'm sorry." I could n't resist adding the question, "Did you move it here before, by yourself?"

She looked at me; then, slowly and guardedly, nodded.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

I shook my head, ruefully I think. "You are a strong woman."

"No," she said, without any change of expression, with not the slightest animation of manner, "but it did n't catch in the matting that time."

I walked toward the door, with my coat thrown over my arm. It was hard to go away like that. I wonder why it is that I seem always to be walking away from women.

At the door I turned and glanced back at her. She was still there by the bureau, watching me go. I felt that she was looking rather intently at the coat on my arm, and it suddenly occurred to me that I must not leave her room like that, in my shirt sleeves. I felt the color come rushing to my face as I struggled into the coat.

I have read in works on the psychology of women that they often tell with a look what they are unable or unwilling to frame in spoken words. Certainly I knew that she had told me to put my coat on, and she knew that I had understood. And so, even as she drove me out of her room there was an understanding between us that was not wanting in subtlety. She had even asked me to make an effort to protect her; and she was no longer angry.

I had my coat on now, and was reaching for

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

the door knob when a sound outside arrested my hand. Men were coming up the stairs to our hall.

She heard them too. She was rigid again, her hand resting on the bureau.

I could hear the Chinese porter talking pidgin-English as he came along the hall. Behind him sounded a ponderous step. Then came another voice, as the heavy step paused right near us — at my door, I thought.

"Here, boy, this is number nineteen."

It was a loose throaty voice, unlike any other in the wide world. I should have recognized it anywhere, in a drawing-room or blindfolded at the bottom of a mine. It brought rushing to my mind pictures of a ship's smoking-room where sat an old man with a wrinkled skin and one drooping eyelid who held forth on every subject known to man — pictures of the absurdly Anglo-Saxon hotel at Yokohama, and of a strange evening at the notorious "Number Nine" where an old man had smiled cynically at me.

Sir Robert had arrived at Pe'ing. He had come to this hotel. He was to occupy room number nineteen, directly opposite the closed door behind which I stood, motionless, breathless.

I felt momentarily ill. Which was foolish.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

"... what is he to me or I to him! But he had stirred a confusion of thoughts in my mind. I saw the face of another man—a strong face, even when flushed with drink—I saw that face with tears on it, working convulsively. And directly behind me stood the woman. There she was, and there, with her, was I myself. I felt the strange, rushing drama of life whirling about me. I suddenly knew that every man is entangled in it—and every woman. . . . Oh, God, why does she have to be so beautiful! And so terribly alone!

The porter was opening the door of number nineteen, just across the hall. Sir Robert was still at my door, swearing to himself.

"Number nineteen this side," the porter was saying. "Tha' number sixteen."

So Sir Robert came heavily along the hall and entered the opposite room. We, the woman and I, heard the porter set down his hand baggage. We heard him order hot water. We heard the door close and the porter rustle away in his robe and his soot Chinese shoes and go off down the stairs.

Then, hardly knowing what I was about, I reached for the knob. But she came swiftly across the floor and caught it ahead of me, holding the

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

door shut. Our hands touched. She looked very lovely, and very tired. My eyes wandered aimlessly over the kimono she wore, of gray crepe silk. It was embroidered from neck to hem in a wistaria pattern of the same soft gray color. I never saw such exquisite embroidery.

"Don't go out there," she said, low but very positive.

"But," I whispered lamely, "but — but —"

"The other door," she said.

So we went back and moved that cursed bureau again. It was even more of a task this time, as we had to be careful about making any noise.

Again I lingered in our common doorway.

"Do you know that man?" I asked, in the guarded tones we were both employing now.

"No," she replied simply, "but it is quite evident that you do."

Still I lingered. And she did not drive me out. She quietly busied herself rearranging the innumerable little articles on the bureau. She was very natural and unconscious about it. There was no hint in her manner that she was aware of the curious interest I felt in all those intimate little accessories of her life. Though I find myself wondering if my crudely concealed masculine emotions are not an open book to her, even so soon. The

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

perceptions of women are finer than ours. I have read that in the psychology books, and I believe it. They feel more deeply and see farther. And it is when they feel most deeply and see farthest that they do and say the inconsequential little things that puzzle us so.

She had the bureau arranged to her taste now, and moved slowly over toward the round table with the bent iron legs. There were a few books on this table—a little red "Guia to Peking," Murray's "Japan," Dyer Ball's "Things Chinese"—her shopping bag, her wrist watch propped up to serve as a clock, and the inevitable ash-tray advertising a Japanese whisky.

Still I lingered there, half in her room, half in mine. She did not look at me. She hesitated at the table and fingered that absurdly vulgar little ash-tray. For the life of me I could not divine what she was thinking or what she wished me to do. I had meant to go straight into my own room and close the door. But I had done nothing of the sort.

It came to me that perhaps she was ready to have me pick up the shattered mood of my musical enthusiasm and carry it forward. Perhaps she would respond to it now. But I could not reconstruct that mood. In a desperate sort of way I

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

was trying from moment to moment to do precisely that, and failing. For across my mental vision was floating, tantalizingly vague, the flushed desperate face of Crocker, as I had last seen him, at the Yokohama station. If this girl only knew it, we have a common interest that binds us a million times closer than the mere gift we both have.

I see I have called her a girl. She seemed so to me at that moment, standing there by the crooked-legged table, slim of body, softly, appealingly feminine in her outlines. I found myself thinking how lonely she must be, and what terrors must lurk ambushed in the byways of her thoughts, particularly at night. I fell to wondering about the man who had brought her out here and left her. Where was he? Did he leave her any money? Not a great deal, surely, or she would not be living in this shabby place. And yet, sad as she is, *she does not know what I know!* I am sure of that. She did not see Crocker's face, there at the Yokohama station. She does not dream that he is scouring the Coast for her from Mukden to Singapore — that in his heart, where pity should be, there is outraged pride, and the exhausting bewilderment of a man who has only a code where he should have been taught a philosophy — and murder.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

This world is hard on women. Perhaps because we men run it.

I slowly drew my foot back across the sill, moving into my own room. I hesitated again, and rested a trembling hand against the door frame.

It broke my heart to look at her, yet I could not keep from it. I wanted to help her. I wanted to *do* something. I even thought wildly of marching straight over to that crooked-legged iron table and taking her two hands solidly in mine and saying—"I know who you are, my dear, and I can imagine something of what you are suffering. I know from a glimpse of you that not one of the men who will be so quick to cast stones at you is fit to touch the hem of your skirt. I know, too, that no man can so much as befriend you without plunging you into a deeper hell of suspicion and torment than the hell you are in now. But I am your friend, and all I ask of you is the opportunity to prove it!"

I was foolish in this, of course.

Suddenly she lifted her head and looked at me.

I grew red all at once, and tried to swallow.

We were quite silent. She relieved the tension by stepping casually away from the table and glancing past me into my room.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

"Is that your phonograph—in there?" she asked, her voice still low, and now a thought husky.

"Yes," said I. "You must have heard it."

She nodded slowly. "Sometimes it sounded like that," she mused. "And other times it was like music a long way off. You played some melodies on a Chinese stringed instrument. They were quaint."

"It is a Japanese instrument," I corrected eagerly. Then I became confused, and knew that I was turning red again. The story of those Yoshiwara melodies and of the outcast girl who had played them for me seemed painfully out of place here. Not for anything in the world would I have told that commonplace story—not to this slim woman with the sad, honest blue eyes. For we do not tell such stories to women.

"You spoke of the piano scale," she went on, in that musing tone. "I never knew before that other people noticed that. Sometimes, when I'm sitting at the piano, and strike one of the black keys after playing on the white, I can hear all around it—overtones, and fractions of tones."

"Tell me," I said—"What is the closest interval you have ever sung?"

She slowly shook her head. "I don't know.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

There never was any reason for trying. And then there was no way to measure fractional tones."

"There is now," said I, emphatically. "My ear. Try it. We shall find out. First give me upper c."

I got out my tuning fork, and struck the note after her.

"Perfect pitch again!" I cried.

"Oh, yes," she replied listlessly, "I can always do that."

"Now take the closest interval you can, below the c."

She did so. Then the next — and the next. I would not permit an *apportamento*, but made her separate the notes. She sang three distinct notes between the c and the b-natural that, on the piano, is the next step down.

I clapped my hands.

A little color came into her cheeks. She took a deep breath and kept at it. Her performance was not quite perfect — she got in only two clean notes between a and a-flat. But at that it was easily the most delicately precise bit of singing I have ever heard. She played with those close intervals with a facility that was amazing. And barring perhaps Sembrich and the earlier Melba, I have never heard such perfection of breath con-

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

trol (Patti doubtless had it, but I never heard her).

She stepped forward, threw her shoulders back (without raising them), swung up on the balls of her feet, and with a fine unselfconsciousness spun out those light, clear threads of tone. When she breathed it was with a quick inhalation that expanded the whole upper part of her body and made you forget how slim she had seemed. She became for the moment a strong, vibrant creature with a light in her eyes. But when she stopped singing that light died out.

"Come!" I cried. "We shall get this down now. We shall prove it on the phonograph. We shall settle that von Westfall beast forever!"

And I rushed back into my own room and prepared the instrument, without so much as ushering her in first. This was rude of me. But I have admitted I was not quite myself.

Before I had the cylinder on and the horn in position she followed. She stood at my side, watching my hands at work. I felt her there, so close, and was elated. I can not describe this sensation. That it is dangerous, I know only too well. It is distinctly a tendency to be resisted.

On second thought, I decided not to waste any of my precious cylinders until she should acquire a reasonable degree of certainty with the delicate

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

scale that was our goal. I explained this to her, and she understood. So I made her work upward from middle *c*, note by note, employing the utmost care to keep the intervals at precisely one-eighth of a tone. Over and over we did this. It called for the closest concentration, on her part as well as mine. I found a sort of wild happiness springing up within me at the thought that this woman has the rarest of all qualities, great capacity for work and for the enthusiasm and utter self-absorption that enter into all real achievement. I can not call her a trained worker. I would not go so far as to say that she has a trained mind. She needs guidance. And I rather imagine that further acquaintance will show that she lacks enterprise. Women of fine quality and great capacity often do, I think. They need stimulus and leadership. Imagine a man with both her extraordinary gift and her striking personality yet stirred by no curiosity to explore and create! "There never was any reason for trying," was all she had said to that, and it was plainly all that was in her mind on the subject.

Women are incomplete creatures.

But — come to think of it — so are men.

Outside, the early April twilight settled down and deepened without our knowing it. It was she

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

who first noted the fact. I was writing down notes on my extra-ruled paper to show her just where she had repeatedly missed our scale by a fine fraction of a tone, and she was bending close in the effort to see. Suddenly she sat up, drew in a quick breath, blinked a little, then reached over and switched on the electric light.

This act broke the tension of our work. We talked on about it for a little while, planning to get at it again in the morning. After a time she rose. But instead of going into her own room she moved over to the window and looked out across the dim, tiled roofs of the Chinese houses toward the walls and trees of the Legation Quarter that were darkly outlined against a glow of electric light.

I had lifted her momentarily out of her solitude. Now she dreaded returning to it. I felt this, with a glow of exultation in my heart that frightened me. But my impulses were too strong to-night to be governed offhand. I followed her to the window and stood beside her looking out, while my pulse raced.

"It's a wonderful old city," I heard myself saying.

And though I did not look around, I knew that she inclined her head by way of reply.

Then for quite a long time we were silent. But

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

my muscles were tense. There was a suggestion gathering head in my mind that I knew had to come out. I waited, resisting it with less and less vigor from moment to moment. I was afraid of it.

Finally it came. I said, "I wish we could have dinner here together."

Then I dug my nails into my palms, standing very still there, and tried to breathe.

I felt her relax, and move a little.

"I am not hungry," she said.

After a minute, as I still waited, she added — "Though I don't know that it makes any difference — if you wish."

"Of course not," said I clumsily — "just having a little food brought in."

So I rang for the China boy, and cleared the phonograph and cylinders and papers and ash-tray off my little iron table, and we had dinner there. Though first she slipped into her room, drew the door to, and changed from her gray kimono to a simple blue frock that I thought very becoming.

After the meal, we sat back without saying anything in particular until she grew restless, and finally pushed her chair back.

"I wish," said I, "before you go, that you

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

would sing that Franz song again for me. And let your voice out a little. I want to hear it."

I thought her eyes grew suddenly moist. But without the slightest hesitation, without rising, even, she began the song—"Aus Meinen Grossen Schmerzen."

But she was still holding her voice in. "Louder," I urged. "Come, come! Sing!"

She could not resist my appeal. Out came the tones, round and rich, and colored with the inexpressible sorrow that is the life-breath of that exquisite song.

I leaned right forward on the table. I could not take my eyes from her broad white throat and the softly rounded chin above it and the finely muscular lips that framed themselves around the tones with a slight flaring out that suggested the bell of a trumpet.

The tears came flooding to my eyes. There was *timbre* in that voice, and a wonderful floating yet firm resonance. When it swelled out in the climax I could feel the sound vibrations throbbing against my ear drums. Then it shrank in volume, and died down until the song ended in a breathless sob that yet was perfect music. And after she had done, and was sitting there motionless, brooding, with downcast face, it seemed to me I could

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

still hear those sad, breathless words, and could still feel that gentle throbbing against my ear.

"You have learned how to sing tha. song," said I.

"Yes," she replied, "I have learned how to sing it."

We were in a sort of poignant dream—I still gazing at her; she still downcast, with the light gone out of her eyes.

Then, directly outside my door in the hall, we heard a man clear his throat. An old man, unmistakably. And we heard heavy footsteps creaking slowly off toward the stairs. God knows how long he had been listening there!

She said nothing. Merely sat with her hands in her lap. But she seemed to me to go limp. Certainly her face grew slowly pale until it was quite white, as I had first seen it.

"I should have known better," I muttered. "I am a fool!"

She did not reply at once. After a moment she rose, then hesitated, resting a hand on the back of her chair. And her eyelids drooped until I could see the long, long lashes against her white skin.

"It was n't your fault," she said, very low. She moved toward her own room. I rose, and

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

followed part way. "The morning will be a better time — to work," I managed to say. "It will be quieter then."

She hesitated in the doorway; then slowly inclined her head, as if in assent. It seemed to me that she was making an effort to smile.

"Good-night," she murmured.

"Good-night," said I.

She closed the door after her. But there remained a narrow opening where the upper part had shrunk away from the frame.

I stood confused, looking about my room. The table was still cluttered with our dinner things.

I got my long raincoat out of the wardrobe that serves me for a closet. I unscrewed a hook from the wardrobe and, climbing on a chair, screwed it into the woodwork directly above the edge of the door. Then I hung my raincoat from it. Thus I closed that narrow opening between her room and mine.

When I went out for my walk, a little later, I came squarely on Sir Robert. He was standing at one end of the clerk's desk, peering through his monocle at the board on which were recorded the names and room numbers of the guests.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

It is an odd and frank custom, that. It is doubtless done for the guidance of the Chinese servants, who know us only by our numbers.

He turned and met me squarely, as I was about to walk by.

"So," he said, wrinkling up his face into a smile and pecking at me with his monocle. His left eyelid drooped unpleasantly. "So — you, my friend, are the fortunate inhabitant of number sixteen. I was captivated by the lady's voice. I congratulate you — again." Then, still smiling as he observed my rising anger, he added—"But, my dear Eckhart, you must not look at me as if I were an intruder — not after the lady has sung like that. I could hardly refuse to listen."

He grew thoughtful, and looked past me toward the door. "Women and song!" he mused. "Women and song! . . . You are a sly devil, Eckhart."

He turned, raised his monocle, and again studied the board — with an insolence that was calmness itself.

He was searching for the name of the woman.

I grew hot all over as I stood there watching him. In a moment — a second — he would find it. But no, he was looking everywhere on the board except in the space next to that occupied

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

by my name. Clearly, it had not occurred to him to look there.

I moved closer and peeped over his shoulder. I had not before observed this board, beyond noting in a general way that it hung here "the clerk's desk. I found myself suddenly wondering if she could possibly have been so careless —

There it was — directly under mine. *Her own name!*

Yes, 'ere it was — "Mrs. H. Crocker." Why she has written herself down so irrevocably I can not imagine. In her dreadful predicament a false name is so clearly indicated.

Still, come to think of it, she herself does not yet know how dreadful that predicament is. I had forgotten that.

I wonder if it is that she consciously and deliberately refuses to sail under false colors. Or if, as is possible, it never occurred to her.

Sir Robert's eyes were still searching the board. They had traversed two rows of names. They were now moving up the third row, closer and closer to numbers sixteen and eighteen.

Then I saw him start. He had found it. He lowered his monocle and carefully wiped it with the handkerchief that he kept in his sleeve. Then he leaned forward and looked again.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

I heard him give a low whistle of sheer surprise.

I could n't stand that. I hurried outdoors and plunged off on my walk.

He was not in sight when I came back, more than an hour later. So I have n't to face that cynical, drooping eye to-night, at least.

It is pitifully indiscreet of her to use her real name this way — in the circumstances. But oh, I am glad, just the same!

*April 6th. Night.*

**W**E worked hard this morning, she and I.  
And a little this afternoon.

That is the thing, of course — work. It steadies me. And it is her only hope. For she has a life to build, poor child!

*April 7th.*

**H**ER name is Héloïse.

I like it. It fits her. Or it would fit her real self. Despite the fact that she is now in a disheartened, quite apathetic phase, I catch glimpses of a Gallic effectiveness about her. It is in her face, in the poise of her body, in the way she wears her clothes.

Yesterday, all day, I successfully avoided Sir Robert. This afternoon, for a moment, he caught me; but I deliberately said good-day and walked off. It was rude. But he, as an Englishman, would not hesitate an instant to be rude to me if the fancy took him. Curiously, he is anything but rude to me. I believe he stations himself where there appears to be a chance of waylaying me. He is even foregoing the big hotel in the Legation Quarter and having some of his meals here, in his room, directly across from hers. Which is disturbing — rather.

April 8th. Noon.

WE have a perfect half scale, at last — *c* to *g*. I shall now drive ahead after the rest of it. It has been a rather more exacting task than either of us foresaw. But she is persistent. If anything she throws too much nervous intensity into her work. She has asked me for copying to do, and even secretarial work. With her reasonably complete musical education she is quite competent to take down from the phonograph the notation of melodies and themes. She shuts herself in at night and works over my papers and music sheets until she is quite exhausted. I have tried to remonstrate; but she insists that she likes having the work to do. Poor child!

She has told me a good deal about her musical life. Not the least of her troubles is the fact that it would take at least two years of the very best coaching to fit her for opera. She has no repertoire to speak of. She has dreamed of the operatic stage from her earliest girlhood. But while she was young the opportunity was lacking. Her father was a high-school superintendent — a man

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

of fineness and principle, I take it, but desperately poor. Her mother, who had been a singer, died when she was a child, the father two years ago. And then after her early marriage to Crocker, her life took a new and strange direction. She says nothing about Crocker. What little she does tell of this more recent part of her life she tells in a very quiet, reserved manner, implying an understanding that I will display no curiosity to learn more.

Yes, she accepts me as a friend. And she still thinks I know nothing of her beyond her bare name. I lie to her a dozen times a day, in my silences. But I don't see what else I can do. Certainly I can't offer her money. I can't buy her a ticket over the Trans-Siberian and send her off to Europe to study for opera. I am foolish enough to have moments of wishing to do just that; but it is, of course, an impossible thought. And to tell her the painful knowledge that is at present locked up in my mind would simply shock and hurt her to no purpose that I can perceive.

We have at least one meal a day together. Yesterday we shared all three meals — breakfast in her room, luncheon and dinner in mine. It seemed the natural thing to do. Excepting the breakfast — that was perhaps a trifle odd. But all during

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

the night, at intervals, I heard her stirring about in her room, and saw that her light was on. Toward morning, feeling rather disturbed about her, I got up, and, at length, dressed. This was about six o'clock.

At six-thirty I stepped out on the narrow little French balcony outside my window. It is less than a foot wide, this balcony, and has a fancy wrought-iron railing.

She also has a balcony, and while I stood there she came out. She was dressed. And she seemed so frankly glad to see me, that I suggested the breakfast. She looked very tired about the eyes. Indeed, I am not sure that she does not grow a shade more tired, a shade slimmer, each day. She eats next to nothing at all.

Certainly, each day she works harder. I am going to think out some way in which I can offer to pay her for this work. It is most assuredly worth something. As it stands now, she even insists on paying for her share of the meals.

*Night.*

SIR ROBERT spoke to her to-day. As luck would have it, I was not at hand.

It has been cloudy, and when she went out for her walk this afternoon she forgot to take her umbrella. She is not timid about the weather, anyway. I have thought once or twice that she likes storms.

She was on her way back to the hotel when the storm broke — not far from the Arcade, where the moving pictures are shown. She took refuge in the entrance to the Arcade until the worst of the rain appeared to be over, then started out again through the wet.

Sir Robert appeared at her elbow, with an umbrella. She did not observe whether he had been following her or merely happened to meet her. He walked to the hotel with her. This was all she told me; but I am sure it was not quite all that occurred.

She asked if he was n't a judge.

"Yes," I replied. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh," said she — "it was something he said."

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

Which was all I learned about that episode. It did not seem to disturb her materially. I was glad it did n't. I made a strong effort to conceal my own foolish anger over it, and trust that I succeeded. At any rate, we dropped the subject.

*April 10th.*

**T**HIS afternoon, late, I came into the hotel from a walk in the rain and went directly upstairs. I had my rubbers on.

The upper corridor was nearly dark, particularly to my eyes that were fresh from the street and the bright lights of the office.

I saw a dark object by her door — a man, undoubtedly, crouching there.

I stopped short, and watched.

He had a white paper in his hand. He fumbled with this for a moment, then slipped it under the door, pushing it clear through into the room with a pencil. Then he got awkwardly to his feet, and stood hesitating. By this time my eyes were partially accustomed to the dim light, and I knew it was Sir Robert. He did not see me. After a moment he tiptoed heavily across the hall to his own door, just opposite and entered, cautiously and silently closing the door behind him.

I walked straight along the hall, past my own door, and stood before his. I had a mind to go in there and strangle him.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

But what was the use? He was an absurd old man, that was all. But none the less, as I stepped back and entered my own room, I found myself shivering oddly. There was an uncomfortable pressure at the back of my head, and my heart was skipping beats.

It is the first time in my life, I think, that I have been seized by the impulse to do physical harm to a fellow creature.

Before putting on my pajamas to-night I stood and looked at my bare chest and arms in my broken mirror. My chest is narrow, my skin white. My arms are thin. Possibly I could n't have strangled him, if I had tried. I wish I were strong.

A little earlier than that, before she closed our door, I asked her if Sir Robert was annoying her in any serious way.

The question made her very grave — graver even than usual. She looked at me, then dropped her eyes, and said nothing. But after a moment she looked up again, made one of those efforts to smile that are pain to me, and shrugged her shoulders. That was all.

*April 11th.*

SIR ROBERT is always hovering about the office and the lounge when I appear, and he always tries to engage me in talk. I can't understand it. He is insistent. He acts as if I fascinate him. Twice to-day I fairly ran away from him. I was afraid I would strike him. It makes me physically uncomfortable to have him so much as stand near me, even if he does not try to take my hand in greeting.

I fear I am not managing this matter very well. I am acting aimlessly, and in a sort of panic of the soul. This won't do.

*April 12th.*

**T**HIS afternoon he caught me squarely at the clerk's desk. He extended a cigar and suggested that we stroll into the lounge and have a chin-chin. I observed that his hand was unsteady, as if the palsy had reached and touched him.

On the spot I made up my mind to face him out. I accepted the cigar, and down we sat.

He asked if I had attended any of the theaters in the Chinese ~~c v~~ that lies to the south of the Tartar Wall. When I replied in the negative, he suggested that we do a little exploring together of an evening.

"The ancient Chinese character is nowhere better preserved," said he, "than in these theatrical performances. And the music, of course, is the pure old strain, quite uncorrupted by Modernism or the West. I can boast of some familiarity with the Chinese drama and music, and even a little acquaintance with the language. It would give me pleasure to act as your guide."

"Thank you," said I, a bit too shortly. "Later on, perhaps. Just now I am very busy with my records."

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

He smiled — all wrinkles. That left eyelid drooped and drooped.

I pulled savagely on my cigar, chewing it so hard that the end crumpled between my teeth and filled my mouth with unpleasant little particles of tobacco leaf.

Then he laughed — with an effort, I thought. It was not a successful laugh.

So we sat for a few moments, in silence and smoke. So men sit often in this queer tangle of life — smoking, smiling, speaking the commonplace phrases that are the current small change of human intercourse, yet hating each other in their hearts.

“I say, Eckhart” — it was a little later on that he came out with this — “you know who she is, of course.”

There was no good in pretending ignorance. God knows I am not quite the child I sometimes seem, even to myself. So I nodded.

He looked narrowly at me. I met his gaze. I was just a thin, nervous man, a little bald, sitting quietly there and smoking, yet all the time that drooping left eyelid irritated me so that I wanted to reach right over and tear it off his face. But I only nodded.

“Dangerous game, my boy,” said he.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

That was his assumption, of course — that to me, too, she was merely a quarry in the endless, universal pursuit of woman by man. Out here on the Coast, of course, from the point of view of the hard world about us, any lone woman is quite legitimate prey.

He was still studying me.

"I'm wondering how much you know," he went on.

"About what?" said I, confused.

"About that woman and the fix she is in. You know who her husband is, surely."

I bowed. "He was on the ship."

"Yes," grunted Sir Robert sardonically, "he was on the ship. And you saw what he did in the Grand Hotel at Yokohama, didn't you? He nearly killed a waiter — a Chinaman, who was quite defenseless. But of course you saw it. I recall that you were dining with him at the time."

"He was drunk," I said huskily, as if in extenuation.

"Yes," repeated Sir Robert dryly. "He was drunk. Rather dangerous at such times, is n't he?"

"Yes, but he quit drinking — after that. Cut it all out." I could not keep my voice from rising a little. I felt my confusion increasing — my

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

thoughts were all adrift, swept here and there by currents of feeling that I could not fathom.

"Oh, he did?" Why would n't that old man take his unpleasant eyes off me! "Oh, he did? You are in his confidence, then. And of course you know even more"—he paused, very deliberately—"regarding his state of mind, his reason for coming out here to the other side of the world, all that?"

I sat limp in my chair, still chewing that crumpling cigar.

Sir Robert leaned back. He was seated on the leather sofa. He let his head rest on the shabby upholstery and studied the ceiling. In one hand he held his cigar, in the other his monocle, tracing patterns in the air with them. His hands are not thin, but the skin on them is crisscrossed with fine wrinkles like the skin on his face and neck.

"My boy," he began, after a time, "I 'm going to offer you a little counsel. You won't take it, but I am going to offer it. Probably, at your age, I should n't have taken it either." He sighed. "I am an old man. For forty-five years I have been observing men—and women. I have seen—well, a good deal, one way and another. And the one fact I have come to be sure of. . . . You know, Eckhart, the great mass of human beings—

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

in Europe and America, at least, labor under the curious delusion that the race has finally worked out something of a civilization. Curious, but they do. It is rot, of course. All rot. There is no civilization. Life is quite as primitive as ever. Only we have developed extraordinary ingenuity at covering life up. That's it. That's our greatest triumph — covering up! At best, it is pretty messy business. And all we can be sure of is that every man owes it to himself and his legitimate offspring to save his skin at all costs, and incidentally, to capture what little he can of the common booty."

He made me nervous. I couldn't sit there indefinitely and listen to his sordid philosophy.

He was quick to catch my mood, and went on more to the point. This shiftiness is the seasoned lawyer in him, I suppose. He is pretty keen, after all.

"Look here, Eckhart — there's no sense in men like you and me beating about the bush. Crocker got blind drunk at Nagasaki, and missed the Shanghai boat. That night he told me the same story that he had doubtless told you. Or did n't he?"

I nodded. As he had said, there was no use beating about the bush.

"Then I've only this much to say, my boy.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

It's the one thing I've learned from life. Never — never — fall in love with a woman. Play with them, yes. Use them. But for God's sake don't let yourself fall in love with them!"

He was speaking with a curious emphasis. His gaze had drifted upward again toward the dirty ceiling. And now it was suddenly my turn to sit and watch him.

"Don't do it!" he went on. "Don't do it. They fasten their lives on you, they smother you. If you don't marry them, it's bad enough. If you do, it's worse. You are an extremely gifted young man. I do not know that I ever met a man with a keener mind or one that impressed me as having more driving, vital force with which to shape a career. You are out here now, right in your best years, full of enthusiasm for your work. Don't let any woman into your life. Good or bad, whatever the phrases mean, a woman is n't happy with a man until she has trimmed the scope of his life down to the compass of her own understanding. She has to get it right into her hands, and choke it. Then life begins to mean something to her. Personally I have come to the conclusion that I get on rather better with the bad women, so called. They don't expect so much. In a way they are squarer — better sports, as you

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

Americans say. Remember, my boy, 'He travels the fastest who travels alone.' "

I was becoming tired of his wandering thoughts. Generalizations are a bore, anyway. They are always loose, and generally wrong. Then, too, I may as well admit that he was disturbing me deeply, this loose-minded but shrewd old man.

"Look here," I said abruptly, "you know of this obsession of Crocker's?"

He bowed.

"Can't we do something to restrain him?"  
He slowly shook his head.

"You don't mean to say that we can't stop a man who is bent on murder?"

"Our motives might be regarded as — well, not exactly clear, yours and mine," mused Sir Robert. "Besides, he has n't done anything. You can hardly restrain a man from becoming indignant if an acquaintance breaks into his house and steals his wife."

"But she is n't his property, like his watch!" I exclaimed.

He smiled tolerantly at me. "In a sense, she is," said he. "In a sense. The weight of law and tradition is against you there, Eckhart."

"Traditions are nothing to me!" said I, hotly.

"They still mean a good deal to the rest of the

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

world," said he dryly. "And even the law still has weight." Then he went on, quite as if I had not interrupted him. "In England it might be possible, in case we could prove that he had openly threatened murder in the presence of competent witnesses, to put him under bonds to keep the peace. But this is n't England — it is the China Coast. At that, what would bonds mean to a strong, self-willed man in Crocker's state of mind! A jealous man!" He raised his monocle, held it a few inches before his face, and looked through it at a speck on the ceiling. He even moved it around a little, and squinted his right eye, as if sighting through a transit.

I wanted to strike it from his shaking fingers. Instead, I sat up very straight and clasped my hands tightly together in my lap.

"Do you know," he continued in that irritating, musing tone, "I believe . . . man is still in love with her, or thinks he is."

"Love!" I sniffed. "You call *that* love!"

He did n't look at me. He was still squinting at the ceiling. Pretty soon he sighed. "When you come right down to it," he said, "if a man has no right to protect his home — and that implies some right of control over his wife — 'love, honor and obey,' you know — what becomes of our in-

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

stitutions! You see, Eckhart, in the eyes of the world Crocker is entitled to a good deal of sympathy. He took care of this woman for years, supported her in some luxury, I take it, gave her a much richer sort of life than she had known before."

"What do you mean by 'richer'?" I cried.  
"More money?"

He waved me back with his monocle, and went on with his argument. "She was unwilling to bear him children. Now, Eckhart, that is serious. She was his wife. She refused there to meet her absolute duty as a wife. English law, at least, is quite definite on that point."

This was dreadful. I could hardly keep in my chair.

"And following all this"—he was growing emphatic now—"she deliberately leaves his home and attaches herself to another man. There is certainly no doubt there, my boy. That is adultery. She dishonored his home. She dishonored him—"

Here, I admit, I lost my temper. I sprang up, and for the second time in my acquaintance with this old man, shook my finger under his nose.

"Rot!" I cried, using his own phrase. "Rot! All rot! He had *dishonored* her home a hundred

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

times." My voice rang out on that word "dishonored." I fairly jammed it down Sir Robert's throat — made him eat that word, letter by letter.

"For God's sake, lower your voice!" said he.

"*Adultery!*!" I shouted this, too. "Good God — 'adultery' is a commonplace to Crocker!"

"You don't know this," said he. Then, "Lower your voice!"

"But I *do* know," I answered him. "He told me himself. '*Adultery!*' Why, millions of men commit adultery — good men, bad men, every sort of men! That's what the millions of prostitutes are *for!* And, guilty or innocent, we all lie about it to the women and the children. Lie — lie — lie! I'm sick of it! I'm a scientist, I tell you, and I don't recognize lies in my business. There's something wrong somewhere. We're all playing at life — all pretending — all making believe — when we ought to be studying the facts, working through those facts toward the truth."

"What *did* I tell you," he broke in, talking around my finger — "covering up!"

"We're afraid of the truth," I shouted. "So we cling desperately to our lies, and call them beautiful. And the truth — beaten down, perverted — undermines us, saps us, beats us at every turn. God, it's awful!" My hand fell by my side.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

"The worst of it is, probably the truth would be beautiful, if we could only find it."

Sir Robert again drew a long, long breath. "But what's the use, Eckhart?" said he. "What you say is of course true. But why make a Quixote of yourself? Why be a dam' fool! Society does cling to its little lie. Even at a sacrifice of half the women in the world. Admitting that some of our traditions are nothing more than out-worn tribal notions, what's the use of beating your brains out against them. I tell you, my boy, if you talk too much of that sort of truth the world will kill you. And the women who call themselves good will lead the attack, for they are the sheltered, the privileged class. No, we must take it as we find it."

But I was past all this now — past the influence of all his miserable sophistry. My head and hands were blazing hot.

"So!" I cried. "You tell *me* to play the coward! Do you not know that every one of the great explorers into the wonderful region of scientific truth has faced the terror and hatred of the world in precisely this way? Do you not know that if those great-hearted men, one after another, had not cut their way through the spiritual horrors of 'tradition' we should to-day be living in

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

medieval darkness and filth? Why, Old Man, you yourself can remember when 'free-thinker' was a term of obloquy. To-day our right to *think* is the finest, greatest right we have.— Do you suppose I care if they kill me?" Again I waved my finger under his nose. "Tell me, Old Man, do you really imagine I care? Don't you know the scientific mind better than that? Can't you see that I admit no tradition, no dogma, no authority. I am a scientist! I am of the most wonderful guild of explorers this wretched old world has yet seen—the guild that is exploring for the truth. Tradition has not stopped us yet. It will never stop us."

I turned away. "Oh, I am disgusted with you," I said—"with you and your beastly, cowardly mind! I'm sick of you!—Understand that? I'm sick of you!" And I walked straight for the door.

Sir Robert followed me. He had to step fast, too. He put his hand on my shoulder, and checked me. He loomed over me.

"Whatever you do, my boy," he was saying, "keep your head. That woman has already wrecked two lives that we know of — possibly a third. Don't let her wreck yours."

I wrenched away from him, and struck out alone

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

into the narrow, muddy street between the Chinese houses.

I walked twice around the *glacis* that borders the Legation Quarter on the north, and through the Quarter from end to end on Legation Street. Scenes flitted past me that I only half saw—Peking carts with blue covers and little windows in the sides, innumerable street merchants uttering musical cries and offering trays of queer-smelling foods, and the usual indolent, good-humored crowds of blue-clad yellow men, with round yellow children playing everywhere, underfoot and out in the mud of the street. In the Ha Ta Road a long wedding procession was passing, with an ornate red sedan chair for the poor little bride, and musical instruments that I did not so much as observe. I saw the stiff, cowed German soldiers on sentry duty at the eastern end of Legation Street; and, farther along, the solid masonry building of the Hongkong Bank; and, down a side street, the great, showy, extremely modern Wagon-lits Hotel. I vaguely noted the walls and trees of the British Compound, where centered the defense against the Boxer attack a dozen years ago. I strode by the American Compound, at the western end, and caught a glimpse through the open gate of lounging American boys in their olive drab. And,

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

emerging on the plaza between the great Chien Gate in the Tartar Wall and the entrance to the Imperial City, I came upon a long train of laden canels, just in from Mongolia, each with a string in its ugly nose.

And all the way I knew that the confused forces that have been tearing at me during this disturbing week were merging into a new line of force. I knew, even then, that this meant a new direction for my life — my life that I once thought so simply and clearly outlined, so perfectly centered on a single interest. Now — God knows what is to become of me!

Did Sir Robert do this amazing thing to me? I can not think clearly. I am that way at times — let another try to bring me to his own point of view, he is more likely than not merely to rouse my own inner voices. I never follow — I lead.

However it be, I only know now that I am a man with blazing fires in me — fires that both sear and illuminate my mind, my emotions, my soul. It is glorious. And terrible.

It was nearly six o'clock when I came into my room. I observed that the connecting door stood part way open. This meant, I had come to know, that she was in, and that I was welcome.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

I tiptoed to the door, and tapped on it with the tips of my fingers.

She was sitting by her balcony, sewing.

"Did you have a good walk?" she asked softly.

She seemed less sad. When I had tossed my hat and stick aside and entered her room, it seemed to me even that a smile was hovering on her lovely face. I could not be certain of this, for she kept her head bowed over her work.

I dropped into a chair by her, and looked at her. Yes, she seemed distinctly softer, even more subtly feminine (as we say) than usual, bending over the needle that moved nimbly to and fro. It struck me that sewing brought out the beauty of her hands.

Finally she raised her head and looked at me. She was smiling.

"I've got it," she said. "Listen."

And with a quick breath and a slight stiffening of her shoulders she began singing the scale upward from middle *c* — sitting there with her sewing in her lap. I listened closely. Heretofore she had usually begun to miss the eighth-tone intervals when she reached *a* and *b*. Now she took them perfectly. I could not detect the slightest inaccuracy of pitch. I noticed that she kept to a marked rhythm, all the way up. The upper *c*

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

she held, with a sudden triumphant glance at me, and trilled on it, very softly.

It brought me to my feet. "Come," I said gruffly, "we'll take that down on the machine."

She followed into my room, explaining eagerly as she watched me putting on the cylinder—"You see, to-day, I realized all at once that I've been downright stupid about it. It occurred to me that singing with a rhythm might carry me right along through it. And then besides I just stopped fussing, and made up my mind that *of course* I could do it. I can do it again, too. You'll see."

She promptly did it again. Again and again, as rapidly as I could put on new cylinders. I seized the occasion to make twelve records. Then we both listened attentively while I played them all over. There was not the slightest doubt that ten were perfect—or so nearly perfect that they satisfied us. And that is near enough. My hands trembled as I put each cylinder back in its box and carefully wrote the labels. Oh, it has been a tremendous day, this day!

She stood right over the machine throughout this performance—and we must have been an hour at it. I asked her to sit, but she laughed a little and said she was too excited.

When the labeled boxes were all carefully put

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

away in a drawer of my bureau, where no accident short of fire could reach them, I came to her and took her two hands. Then suddenly I could not say anything at all.

But she looked right at me, and returned, very frankly, the pressure of my hands, and smiled, though there were tears in her own eyes.

"I'm so glad," she said. "You just don't know — I've wanted so to be of *use* —"

She gently tried to withdraw her hands. I released one, but, still unable to speak, clung to the other; and hand in hand we walked to the French window and stepped out, side by side, on the narrow balcony. Then I let her hand go, and we leaned on the railing and breathed in the sweet April air.

It was evening now. Electric lights were twinkling. Gay paper lanterns hung out from nearby buildings. The confusion of street cries floated up faintly to our ears.

My time had come.

But it was hard to speak directly. First I told her how wonderfully she has helped me, and to what a practical end.

All she said to this was — very softly, gazing off at the lights — "I'm glad."

I rambled on. Which would not do. My time



We leaned on the railing and breathed in the sweet  
April air



## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

*had* come, and I was letting it slip away. It was characteristic of me, I thought almost bitterly — always, except in the one narrow channel of my work, blundering ineffectually, missing the realities of life.

I gathered my forces, with a great effort. I felt sober, stern, all at once.

“Listen, please,” I began.

Instantly I knew that she had caught the change in me. I thought I felt her nerves tighten, though I was not touching her. I blundered on.

“You have come to know me,” I said.

“Yes,” she breathed, “I have come to know you.”

“And by this time you know just about the sort of man I am. I must assume that you know that, because I expect you to take all of me into account in what I am going to say. I know I shall say it badly. I doubt if I shall succeed at all in saying even what I mean. Yet, you’ve got to understand me.”

She kept silent; but it seemed to me, in the subtle understanding we had somehow reached, that she assented to this preliminary condition.

“I am going to put it bluntly,” I rushed on. “It’s the only way I can say it at all. I see two facts, as regards you and me. One is that you are

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

a wonderful woman. You have great gifts. You have what we call temperament — a silly word, but there is no other for the precise meaning. It is an absurd waste to keep you here. You must go to Berlin or Paris — Paris, I think, for the French music is the most stimulating of any to-day. You must be prepared for opera just as rapidly as possible. There is no time to lose."

Her mouth twisted into a fleeting half-smile. "It is quite out of the question," she murmured.

"No, it is not out of the question!" My voice was rising, and she had to give me a warning look. "I do not know quite how it is to be managed, but I can see a beginning, at least."

She seemed surprised at this, so I talked more and more rapidly. "First, you must consider my second fact. Remember, I am speaking only as a practical scientist — quite impersonally." God forgive me, this seemed true at the moment! "What you have done for me has a value that I dare not even estimate. Though my income is not great, even from my text books, I would gladly have traveled thousands of miles and devoted months of work to the securing of the phonographic close-interval scale that now is securely mine."

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

She was beginning to stir restlessly. But I would not let her speak. "Take your copying and clerical work alone—perhaps, I should not say this—I could not possibly get such devoted and expert assistance anywhere in the world without paying a reasonable price by the week. Now hear me! You must not close your mind to what I am saying!" For I knew she was doing just that, as women will. I caught her arm—and her hand—in my two hands and clung to her. She did not resist. Nor did she respond—merely looked soberly off over the city, and seemed, all the time, to be drifting away from me. My head was burning hot. My forehead was dripping wet, and I had to shake the drops of sweat out of my eyes. Great, wild thoughts were gripping my mind, that had been so confused. I knew then that I must get her out of Peking, away from that ugly, persistent old man across the hall, away from the drink-crazed younger man who thought he could by a violent act restore what he called his honor. I knew that I must be equal to this task. I must find the way. And I must persuade her.

So I cried—

"You *must* listen! I will not place you in my debt. But you have placed me in yours. You must be fair to me. You must let me help you

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

by paying my debt to you. I promise you I will do more than that. But oh, you must be fair to me!"

She would not look at me. I had her right forearm and hand in the grip of my hot, trembling hands. Her left elbow rested on the iron railing of the balcony, her chin on her hand. And her eyes roved off over the roofs of the Chinese houses, over the walls and trees of the Legation Quarter, off southward toward the temple of Heaven that stood somewhere there behind the trees and the starlit sky above it.

More and more my thoughts were slipping out of control. I struggled to hold them, but could not. I had never in my life felt like this.

"You must not let the fact that I love you confuse your sense of justice," I went on, quite as if she and I had long known and admitted my love for her. "That is another matter altogether. Except in this—I know now that as long as I live I shall want to help you. This is quite beyond your control, or mine. It simply happens to be so. And it does seem to me that since it is so, you can at least let me help you to the extent that is practically and impersonally fair."

It was curious how the mere utterance of those three words, "I love you," cleared my mind. It

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

explained everything. It relieved me by extricating me from all uncertainty of thought and feeling. It thrilled me, deeply and solemnly. I wanted to say it over and over and over. I wanted to take her into my arms and whisper it into one ear and then into the other. I wanted to whisper it to the stars up there, the stars that have heard so much. I wanted to go over to the big hotel in the Quarter, where there would be bright lights and tourists and gilded military folk and gay ladies, and say it so that all might hear and share the thrill of it.

My talk dwindled out. What part had more argument in *this*? My grip on her arm relaxed; I held only to her unresponsive hand, and leaned on the railing beside her.

For a long, long time we were still there. Then, finally she withdrew her hand.

I looked at her and saw that her eyes were shining, and there were tears on her cheek.

"Oh," she murmured, "why — why — could n't we have gone on!"

"You don't mean that we can't go on!" said I.

She looked full at me, and inclined her head. To-day she has had more color, her face has not had so much of the worn, tired look. But now, by the half-light that fell on her from the window,

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

I saw that it had all returned. She was very sad, very tired.

"You have spoken," she said, "of money — and of love. Oh, I wish you had n't!"

Then she must have read my feelings on my face, for she put her hand on my arm and added —

"I did not mean to hurt you. It has been beautiful. You don't know — even you, you don't know. You almost made life n...n something again. Nothing that I could ever do would pay you back for that. It made me almost happy — just to be useful. All my life I have wanted to be that. And they have made a toy of me. Or they have wanted me to do something I could n't do. You have helped me to do what I can do."

"It *has* been beautiful," I thought. Or perhaps I said it aloud, for she inclined her head again.

"It has been like a dream," she said. "I know it could n't be so, but oh, how I have clung to it! I have blundered so with my life . . . but this seemed real."

"It is real," said I.

She looked away.

Again for a time we stood silently there, and looked out over the curving tile roofs. -

And again I felt that she was slipping away from me. It was good that I had spoken my love.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

That would stay in her thoughts. Perhaps it would grow there. Perhaps the magic that was stirring wonderfully in my heart would touch and stir her heart. I knew at that moment that I loved her more than all the world — more than my work, more than my life. I knew, with exultation, that I was plunging out into uncharted ways, where lives are as often wrecked as not. And I did not care. I was glad.

Her shoulder brushed mine, as we leaned side by side on the railing. There was sheer intoxication in that contact. I raised my arm, fairly holding my breath, and put it about her shoulders. I caught her two hands, there by her chin. I saw lights, trees, sky in a swirl of happy things. A voice was thrilling in my heart. I gripped her tightly, and tried to kiss her. But she struggled. She tried to push me away. She fought me.

And then, as I staggered back, the tears came from my own eyes, blinding me.

She ran back into my room, and stood there. I followed. "It was in my heart to do it!" I was saying, like a fool. "It was in my heart to do it!"

She dropped on a chair, very limp and white. She motioned me to take another.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

"You must not be like the others," she was saying, in a desperate, choking voice—"you must not! I can't bear it!"

I could not think. "I am not," I replied, low—"I am not. I love you. You shall see."

This was getting us nowhere. Her eyes were dry now, and oh, so sa' and tired. She was slowly shaking her head at me.

"You are killing—everything!" she said. But she said it gently.

I could not speak. I only looked at her—looked and looked. Then I went over to the phonograph and worked aimlessly over it. I think I wound it up.

She still sat there, her hands limp in her lap.

Finally she said, in a low voice that was yet steady—"I wish I could love you."

"You can," I muttered. "You shall!"

She slowly shook her head. "No," she breathed.

"But you must," I went on. "It is the only thing now. It is the one way out for you and me."

This had some effect on her. She pursed her lips, and thought.

But after a little she shook her head again, and made that listless gesture of her left hand that

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

she had made that first day, when I broke into her room.

"Something has died in me," she said. "I don't believe I can ever love a man again."

She rose, and moved toward her own room. On the sill she paused, and picked at the flaking paint of the door frame.

"I do not believe it is the only way out," she said. "You will get over it, of course." Then, at the shake of my head, she corrected—"At least, you will have your work, and the feeling that you are getting somewhere with your life. I should think that would be the one great thing, after all. And I shall at least know that I am not hurting another life. I hurt everybody that cares for me. If I could—love you, I should undoubtedly hurt you."

"Wait," said I, "we will go on with our work, at least—in the morning."

She pursed her lips again. "I don't know," she replied, as if she were thinking aloud, "whether that is possible."

"It must be possible!"

She shook her head. "You will have to let me think about that."

Then she closed the door, and was gone.

I had meant to give her my life. I had only

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

succeeded in taking away from her that part of it that had been helpful to her.

I find it difficult to reconstruct the hour that followed. I remember standing a long while by the window. Once I went to her door, just so that I might hear her moving about her room. But as I stood there it seemed like an intrusion, and I came away.

Many, many things that I might have said to her came rushing to my thoughts. I wanted to say them now. I wanted to go right into her room and say them.

All the time my heart was beating very rapidly, and my blood was hot. Love, it seems, is like a fever. I never knew this before. I have always thought it a weakness when I have seen what men call love apparently devastating a life. Now I see that I must correct this judgment. For love is a force that operates beyond the jurisdiction of reason or will. I begin to think that I must expect less assistance from my own reason than heretofore.

That long, wild hour of my solitude somehow passed. It occurred to me to go outdoors. I picked up my hat and stick. Then, irresolute, I moved to the window and looked out over the city.

While I stood there Mr. Robert came up the

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

stairs. I heard his ponderous step, more hurried than usual, come along the corridor. There was a silence while, I knew, he was fumbling for his key. Then a jingling, and the sound of his door opening.

I think that an old man is the structure his younger self has built. How badly this man has built. Myself, often when tempted to do this or that, I have thought—"Will it make toward a sweet old age?"

He had talked to me cynically of love, had Sir Robert, only a few hours ago. What would he say now if he knew the immensity of the forces he had stirred and brought to the surface of my consciousness. I smiled as I thought that perhaps I owe much to that old man. I almost wanted to thank him.

So I stood there by the window, thinking many things. And the April air was sweet.

After a little time I started for my walk, my second walk this day under stress of great emotion. But in the course of the few hours intervening I had crossed a line. The man who was now about to step lightly down the stairs and stroll out through the shabby office of the hotel was a new man, one who had never before gone down those stairs or out through that office.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

I lingered a moment by her door. I could hear her light step. And she was humming—oh, so softly! Humming another song by her favorite, Franz. It was the dainty, exquisite—

*"Mädchen mit dem roten Mündchen."*

It seemed to me that there was a new brightness in her voice.

I slipped out into the corridor.

Sir Robert's door stood open. I stepped across and looked in. I had pushed my hat to the back of my head, to let the air cool my forehead. And I think I was swinging my stick.

From behind the closed door across the hall came, very faintly, that floating, silvery voice.

Sir Robert's room was in confusion. He had drawn his leather steamer trunk to the center of the room, opened it, and placed the tray across an arm-chair that stood by the head of the bed. The bed was covered with shirts, underwear, collars, books and papers in disorderly heaps. Shoes littered the floor. His evening clothes were laid out on the table, other suits across a chair.

On the edge of the bed, amid the disorder, sat Sir Robert. He was in his shirt sleeves. His waistcoat was unbuttoned, his white hair rumpled so that it stuck up grotesquely over his ears.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

"Well, well," said I. "Is n't this unexpected?" He looked up.

His face never had any color to speak of, but now it was a pasty gray. His eyes were sunken, but with a curious sparkle in them. He said nothing, just stared at me.

"Well," I repeated, "are you leaving?"

Still he merely stared at me. It was unpleasant. I felt my assurance fading out, and stood stupidly there, unable to think of anything further to say.

"He's here!" whispered Sir Robert then.

"Who — who —" My nerves were tightening. The left side of his face twitched.

I heard myself saying — "But that's impossible. He would n't be here yet."

Sir Robert dropped his eyes now. I was glad of this. They made me extremely uncomfortable. He began packing his shirts in the tray of his trunk.

"How did he come here?" It was still myself speaking.

"Good God — how should I know!" he muttered. "What has that to do with it?"

"Where are you going?"

"I don't know," he was answering me. "There are trains in the morning. And I won't stay here to-night. I won't stay here to-night!"

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

"Are you sure of this?" I asked. Why was it that my mind seemed to be refusing utterly to react from this news! Why could n't I realize it! Why could n't I think!

"He's at the Wagon-lits. I saw him. He is drinking. This is no place for you, either. I advise you to move quick."

"No," said I, "I shall see him. He and I got on very well. I shall talk with him. It is time some one forced him to listen to reason."

Sir Robert, I recall, had a shoe in his hand at this moment. It fell to the floor. At the noise, we both started. His face twitched again—on the left side. He looked at me, with eyes like little glass beads.

"Why not?" I added.

Sir Robert drew in a long breath.

"Crocker told me he was going to kill that woman and the man she is living with," he said, slowly and huskily.

"Yes," I put in, with a sort of eagerness, "but don't you see—"

"It would be exceedingly difficult to convince a jury," he went on, deliberately silencing me, "that she is not at present living with—"

"Well?" said I, thinking queer, rapid thoughts. "You," he finished.

April 12th — very late.

I WALKED slowly back into my own room, trying to think; but my mind was inert.

In the next room Heloise was still singing, softly and brightly.

I stepped out on the little balcony.

What was it Sir Robert had said? Oh, yes, that Crocker had come to Peking. This was dreadful. It meant trouble. One way or the other, I myself was involved in this trouble. A wife is, in a sense, the property of her husband — in a sense. If she dishonors his home by leaving him for another, he has some right to be indignant. If his outraged sense of possession lashes him into a murderous passion he can not be stopped from killing her. In England now — something about competent witnesses. And the difficulty of convincing a jury that she was not living with me. . . .

In the confusion of mind that lay over my faculties like a paralysis, one curious fact sticks out in my memory. I deliberately shook myself, standing there on my balcony. I tried to shake myself awake.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

I seemed to be recalling a story that the fat vaudeville manager from Cincinnati told on the ship, one night. It had to do with a celebrated prize fight in New York some years back. He reveled in memories of fights, that vaudeville man. An odd mental habit!

On the occasion he mentioned, one fighter was knocked down and very nearly, as the phrase runs, "out." Lying there upon the floor of the ring, dazed, all but unconscious, the man actually beat his own head against the floor in a desperate effort to rouse himself.

Over and over again that picture rose in my mind. I have never witnessed such a spectacle. Primitive brutality has played, needless to say, no part in my life. But at this time, caught up and whirled about, as I was, in a bewildering conflict of primitive emotions, it was a second-hand recollection of the prize ring that came to my aid.

The fact is not uninteresting.

I chanced to glance down. A tiny, lacy ball lay there at my feet. I picked it up. It was Heloise's handkerchief.

I held the absurdly small square of linen and lace in my two hands and looked at it. I folded and unfolded it. I pressed it to my lips, again and again.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

Am I to become the helpless victim of these crude emotional uprushes — like any common clerk with his shopgirl? I, who have for so long observed the human herd from afar with a sort of casual interest? . . . I wonder.

Suddenly the thought of the man Crocker came to me. He was in this city. He was over there in the Legation Quarter, behind the walls that I could see — over in the big hotel. He was drinking again. And there was murder in his heart.

It seems to me that this thought — I am trying to face my strange, new self, and set everything down; God knows I need the discipline! — that this thought was followed by a little blaze of heroics. I am somewhat confused about this, of course — one can not analyze one's own emotions with any degree of accuracy while they are still active — but I recall going out into the hall and standing there like a sentry. I was determined to protect my lady with my life. I saw myself fighting gloriously for her; and I saw her, close at hand, witnessing my every valiant act, and exulting in my prowess.

A child has such notions. And, I note, a lover. I stood for a time at the top of the stairs. Crocker should never mount those stairs alive. Behind me, through the transom of number eight-

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

een, there occasionally came floating clear little threads of tone. Heloise was singing as she moved about her room. She did not know. And she should not know — not yet. Perhaps I could find a way to spare her. At any rate, Crocker would never pass those stairs without fighting his way over my body.

Once I tiptoed back and tapped at Sir Robert's door; even tried the knob, but it was locked. He had gone, evidently.

I don't seem to know quite why I sought that old man again. It was an impulse. Perhaps I wanted him to see that his warning had had no effect on me, none whatever.

It was getting on into the early evening now, say between seven and eight. I half-saw one of the Chinese waiters come up the stairs with a tray for Heloise. I leaned against the wall when he passed. But for some reason it did not occur to me to order food for myself. I could not have eaten out there in the hall, anyway; and were I to sit in my room, even with the door open, there was a possibility that Crocker might rush by before I could stop him. So I ate nothing, all the evening. I could n't eat now, if food were brought to me. The reactions of what we call love are curiously related, it appears, to the various bouily

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

appetites. I am almost ready to define love as a general disturbance of all the nerve centers, accompanied by strong, positive, emotional excitement and a partial paralysis of the reasoning faculty.

Some little time passed while I stood there at the head of the stairs. A fit of impatience, that may have had in it an element of morbid eagerness to hasten the event, took possession of me. After all, it was not essential that I should stand guard at that particular spot. I walked slowly down the stairs and, making a strong effort to appear unconcerned, through the office and out the door. He would have to come in this way.

I walked slowly along the narrow street toward the Italian *glacis*. It would be better, much better, to meet him out here.

There has been a chill in the air this evening. And the wind has risen, stirring up clouds of the powdery loess dust that is the curse of this wonderful old city.

For a long time I paced that street, breathing at times through my handkerchief in order to avoid the choking dust.

As the evening wore away, my resolution weakened. I began to see myself for the absurdity I unquestionably was — I the thin, nervous man of

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

science, pitifully inexperienced in the ways of this sadly violent world, yet endeavoring to swell myself up (like the frog in the fable) into a creature fit to cope with that world. It is absurd. I am not a violent man. I don't understand violence. There is no place for it in my philosophy, for my philosophy is based on fact and reason. There is no room for violence in an orderly world. Yet, under the pretense of civilization which is spread so plausibly over the surface of modern human life, I am confronted at every turn by the spirit of violence. And my own reason and sense of fact, in which I have so often sought sanctuary, have now failed me utterly.

Little by little my walks to and fro carried me farther into the broad open park that is called the *glacis*. That odd, morbid eagerness was drawing me steadily nearer and nearer the little foreign city within the Legation walls.

Finally I entered the Quarter. The great masonry walls fairly breathed of violence.

There is a sharp angle in this narrow road where it enters the Quarter, so constructed that the street can not be raked, from without, by shot and shell.

I passed under a sentry box on the wall, from which an armed soldier peered out at me — placed there because he might be needed to prevent or

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

commit murder. For he and his like are but the trained agents of violence, masquerading behind a thin film of patriotism and what men still call glory.

Once within the walls I walked very rapidly. I was conscious that my whole body had tightened nervously, but I was powerless to relax. The blood was racing through my arteries and veins. I could feel that old throbbing at the back of my head. And my forehead was sweating so that I had to push my hat back. I carried my heavy walking stick—it had seemed that I might need it—and I was swinging it as I walked, gripping it so tightly by the middle that it all but hurt my hand.

There was no stopping me now. I went straight through to Legation Street, hurried along it, past the bank and the big German store, and turned off south toward the great hotel with its hundreds of bright lights and its noisy little swarm of rickshawmen on the curb.

I entered the wide hall that leads to the office and stood there, while my eyes searched about among the moving, chatting groups of people. There was a circle of tourists about the old Chinese conjuror who sat on his heels in a corner among his cloths and bowls and what not; I walked slowly around this circle, seeking the erect figure,

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

the solid shoulders, and the drink-flushed face of Crocker.

I walked deliberately through the lounge, studying every solitary figure there among the easy chairs and the little tables and the potted shrubbery.

I went down the long corridor to the bar, and stood squarely on the threshold surveying the large room. There was a considerable number of men there — fifty or more, easily. The dress uniforms of half the armies of Europe flashed their gilt at me. All the tables were occupied, and there was a solid rank at the bar, behind which slab of mahogany the sober, silent Chinese waiters worked deftly at catering to the vices of these dignified gentlemen from the Christian West, now and then pausing to take in the scene with inscrutable, slanting eyes. There was much loud talk, some laughter, and, at one of the tables, a little quarreling.

Here, sure enough, was Crocker.

He sat in the corner across from the door and a little to the left. He was alone. A whisky bottle stood before him on the table, and a number of glasses. His face was very red. His big, usually vigorous body leaned limply against the wall. His head rolled slowly back and forth. There could be no doubt that he was very drunk. It seemed

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

to me that he would have rolled to the floor had not his body been wedged in between the wall and the back of his chair.

I will admit that I was profoundly relieved. Nothing could be done to-night. Crocker could not act, or talk, or even listen.

Even now I feel that relief. Though I have observed Crocker closely enough to know that when he recovers from this debauch he will be dangerously unbalanced, I am glad of even a day's delay. He was in what he himself referred to as the "hangover" stage when he knocked down the waiter at Yokohama.

I may as well admit further — since this journal must be honest or else cease to exist — that this first sight of the man since Heloise entered my life and so vitally changed it was unexpectedly unsettling to me. Despite his condition at the moment, I felt again, looking at his shoulders and chest and arms and the outlines of his head, the primitive force of the man. And the expression of his face, now maudlin with drink, oddly recalled my memory of him as I had last seen him, at the Yokohama station when there were tears on it. I had never before seen a man cry. I do not know that the possibility of such extreme emotion in a strong man had ever occurred to me.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

He holds ideas regarding men, women and morality that are profoundly repellent to me, this crude yet not wholly unattractive man. He is permitting his life to be wrecked for these ideas — which at least indicates some sincerity. Heaven knows a man can't "own" a woman, or a woman "own" a man. Neither can possibly possess more of the other than that other is compelled by the power of love to give. There are no "rights" in love.

Yet — and this is the puzzling thing — when I was with Crocker, I liked him. And he liked me.

Savagely as he is mistreating his splendidly vigorous body, desperately as he is permitting his mind to become confused and brutalized, he is, even now, by no means a besotted man. I am not certain that he could properly be termed a drunkard. There is yet stuff in him. There is energy in him, that could be used. But in his stubborn purpose of destruction he is incidentally destroying himself.

What is this mystery of sex that it should enter a man's heart in the guise of love only to tear that heart to pieces?

Pale wanderings, these! And sad. For they tell me that in all the so-called practical affairs of

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

life I am a weak person of confused mentality. There is bitterness in the thought.

I rather like that man. I think I feel a deep pity for him. And I am his mortal enemy. I can not understand it. But it is so.

I think I will give you up, you Journal that have so long been my companion in the rich solitude of my working life. For this life of mine is a working life no longer. It has turned off into the dark byways of passion. My purpose, hitherto compelling, falters now. My once clear mind is clouded and confused. I do not know when I shall work again. I do not know what I shall do. I only know that all is dark and still in the room next to this dingy room of mine, and that a sad, beautiful woman sleeps softly there. I only know that I love her beyond my strength, and yet that I seem unable to hate the man who would hate me if he knew.

It is only a little later — in the very early morning. I have reconsidered. I shall not yield to this weakness. After all, it may steady me to continue my old-time habit of writing everything down. Besides, it is clear that I shall have no sleep this night. It will be better to keep occupied at something.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

It was my weakness for introspection, I think, that brought me to that state of bewilderment. I seem to get along better when I confine my narrative closely to the facts. I must resolve again, as I have resolved before, simply to tell what took place. Just tell it.

I turned away from the bar-room door. A number of men from one of the legations approached along the corridor. They were talking and laughing rather freely, and were all tall men, so that I neither heard nor saw the man behind them until after I had stepped aside and across the corridor to let them pass in to the bar. And the man behind followed them in without seeing me.

It was Sir Robert. He was in evening dress, of course, true to his British breeding. His monocle dangled against his shirt front. He was bowed a little. His hands shook perceptibly as he walked. And I observed that same new nervous twitching on the left side of his face.

He stepped a little way into the room and looked about, as I had done. I waited. I did not seem to care whether he saw me or not, but felt no desire to invite conversation with him.

His eyes finally rested on the drunken man in the corner. His left eyelid drooped and drooped, as it always does when he is thinking intently. It

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

seemed to me that he stood there for a long time, and that there was irresolution on his face. Myself, I could not take my eyes off him; it fascinated me to watch his drooping eyelid and the twitching corner of his mouth.

After a time he slowly turned and came out. He did not so much as know that I was there. He was studying the carpeted floor — thinking, thinking. I followed him.

He moved slowly out through the lounge to the street door, bowing coldly to certain of the individuals he passed. He went out, and down the steps.

The ragged rickshaw coolies pressed about him. He brushed them aside with his hand. For a moment he stood there, on the stone sidewalk. Once he turned, as if to reenter the hotel; but wavered, and stood still again.

I thought he saw me, waiting in the doorway, but believe now that he did not.

Finally he stepped up into a rickshaw, and waved his hand. His coolie picked up the shafts and set off on a run.

I hurried down the steps, leaped into the next rickshaw, and followed.

He went as directly as the streets permitted to our little *Hôtel de Chine*.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

So he was coming back!

I dismissed my rickshaw at the corner of the street and walked to the hotel.

He was not to be seen in office or lounge, so I went on up the stairs.

As I mounted, I heard voices. I stopped short when my eyes cleared the top step, and looked down the corridor.

Heloise's door was a little ajar. I could tell this by the rectangular shaft of light thrown from her room across the dim passage. Sir Robert had unlocked his own door, just across from it, and was standing with his hand on the knob, crouching a little, evidently listening to the conversation in her room.

I stood motionless.

One of the voices — that of a man — grew a little louder; but I was too far off, there on the stairs, to catch what he was saying. Then, rather abruptly, the door swung open and the man backed out. He was the manager of the hotel.

At the same instant Sir Robert, with agility surprising in one of his age, darted into his own room and swiftly, but softly, swung the door nearly to behind him. The manager was too intent on his own words and thoughts to know of this.

I could not think what to do. The one thing

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

I was sure of was that I did not want to speak to the manager, coming, as he was, directly from her room. So I ran down the stairs, and was in the lounge looking at a magazine when he appeared on the ground floor.

I waited a few moments longer, then went up again. I simply had to know what Sir Robert was about. And again I stopped when my head rose just above the top step.

Sure enough, there he was — that old man! — crouching by her door and tapping softly at it with his shaking fingers. I felt a slow, cold sort of dread creep across my mind and my nerves. I did not move.

He tapped and tapped — oh, so softly! He stooped to the keyhole and whispered. I could not hear him, but I could see it all in pantomime.

He gave this up; and stood thinking. He slipped into his own room and switched on the light, but did not close the door. In a very short time he reappeared with a white paper in his hand — an envelope, doubtless.

And for the second time I had to watch this monstrous old man get down on his shaking knees and with a pencil thrust his evil communication in under her door.

This done, he got to his feet (I could hear his

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

heavy breathing), lingered only a moment, then returned to his room, leaving his door ajar.

I came on up the stairs then, walking as heavily as possible, and let myself into my own room here.

I kept silent for quite a time until I heard Sir Robert's door shut. Then I tapped on Heloise's door. Again and again I tapped there, but she would not reply. She is avoiding me, and that is disturbing. Her light went out soon after that.

On looking back, I see that I have spoken of her as sleeping. Since then I have thought, on two occasions, that I have heard her tiptoeing about her room; but for the most part it has been unusually still there. I have wondered if she is out on her balcony; but I dare not look. I shrink from it. For she is avoiding me. She would not answer my tapping on her door — the light, nervous tapping that she knows so well. And one thought stands out in all the dreadful, turbulent confusion of this hour. It is that I must not try to see her if she does not wish to see me.

It is just two o'clock.

I shall not sleep. I shall not even undress. This is not wise of me, I suppose. But it is the way I feel. And I am a creature of feeling now. It would help to pass these dreadful hours

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

if I could go on writing — or if I could read. But she will know it if I do not put out my light. Perhaps she would worry.

So I shall sit here in the dark. Or walk to the window and look out at the sleeping city — at this rich old capital of a peaceful people, who smile languidly at the turbulent West from which I spring (like Crocker and his sorry kind) — who turn from the miseries of actual life to the philosophy of their ancient seers.

Though, come to think of it, I am wrong here. Even gentle, contemplative old China has been drawn from her slumber of the ages into the whirlpool of modern life. I was thinking of the past. I had forgotten. They are carving out a republic here now. Their hands are stained with blood. And the sometimes violent bankers of the Western world sit coldly over them while they struggle.

There is no peace. There is no clear thought. There is only life. Only life.

*April 14th.*

ALL the rest of that night of the 12th-13th I sat in my dark room, or softly walked the floor, or gazed out at the sleeping city from my one window. And all night I was conscious of unusual and increasingly violent nervous reactions. Turning the pages back, I note that I attempted the other day to write a definition of love. This was absurd. I do not know what love is. Nobody knows. It is a capricious and wild thing. It flashes like the lightning, and rushes like the wind. It grows by feeding on itself. It exalts. It devastates. It contains within itself all the latent possibilities of nobility and service, of lust and jealousy, of tenderness, of sacrifice, of murder. It is a blind, insistent force; yet it shines before the mind's eye like dewdrops on the gossamer wings of fairies.

When morning finally came, I stood there at my window and watched the sun climb slowly over the Legation walls. It was a flat red sun, hung behind a film of dusty air.

I wondered how long it would be before I should

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

tap on Heloise's door. Not long, I feared. All night I had been waiting; all night I had been withholding my hand.

I heard her get up, and stir about her room. I wondered if she had slept. Perhaps, for she still did not know what I knew.

For a long, long time I waited.

Finally, at seven o'clock, I tiptoed across the creaking floor. I stood there by the door. I raised my hand, then dropped it. My throat became suddenly dry.

At length I tapped.

She had been stirring there, on the other side of the door. Now, at the sound, she was still.

I tapped again. And again.

She did not answer me.

I whispered her name. I spoke it louder.

This would not do. Sir Robert had tapped at her door. He too had whispered. She had not answered him. She would not now answer me. I turned away — hurt, bewildered.

I do not know how long I stood there, motionless, a little way from the door. I could not think clearly. And all the time it seemed to me that I must force myself to think.

After a time I deliberately went downstairs and ordered a light breakfast. But when it came I

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

could not eat it. I could only nibble at a crust of toast and sip a little of the *café au lait*.

I went out into the air and walked about. It was absolutely necessary that I should steady myself. The day was big with evil possibilities. Crocker, if I could judge from my one previous experience with him, might be up and about by mid-afternoon. I must control myself. I must be calm. Crocker had a set purpose and a strong body. I, presumably, though weak in body, had a mind. I was the only obstacle between Crocker and his purpose.

It was just a quarter past nine when I turned back into the street that led to the *Hôtel de Chine*. The shops, with their highly colored displays and their quaint smells, were all buzzing with the rush of the morning trade. Coolies, merchants, purchasers and idlers of all ages jostled to and fro. Underfoot the children swarmed.

I was picking my way through this busy little thoroughfare, when, looking up, I saw Heloise step out of the hotel. She wore a veil that hid her face from me. And then she was a hundred feet or so away. She turned in my direction. The street crowd closed in between us, and for a moment I lost sight of her.

I remember plunging crazily forward to meet

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

her. Then I saw her again, and my heart stood still. For Sir Robert had followed her out of the hotel and caught up with her. She had stopped, and was listening to him.

He took her arm.

She withdrew her arm from his touch. But she made no effort to leave him. She was standing irresolute, I thought, listening to him. I plunged toward them again.

Then suddenly I stopped. For they were walking together now — right toward me. He was bending down over her. I could see that he was talking to her, very earnestly. And she was listening!

He reached out with his stick, as I watched, and brushed a group of coolies aside. He was protecting her.

I just stood there. I could not think out what I ought to do. I had meant to rescue her from him. But I could not do this against her wish. A moment more and they would be upon me.

Still I hesitated. Finally, really without any plan of action, I stepped up and into a Chinese shop and watched them as they walked slowly by.

He was talking — still talking — in a low, insistent voice. I could not hear what he was say-

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

ing. And I could not quite make out her expression behind her veil.

When they were well past, I stepped out. I followed. For I had come to this.

At the *glacis*, they turned to the right, walking, oh, so slowly. And I, a miserable thing with nothing but ungovernable turbulence in my heart, dodged in and out among the street traffic, and shadowed them. I shadowed the woman I love.

They went — without thought or aim, apparently — around outside the wall of the Imperial City and toward the Chien Gate. At the western end of Legation Street they paused, and for a few minutes stood on the corner. He was talking, talking, talking. I saw him making eager, nervous gestures with his monocle between his fingers.

Then, slowly, they moved on toward the old stone ramp that leads up to the top of the Tartar Wall, just outside the compound of the American Legation.

I could not follow them here, for I should certainly be seen.

Heloise hesitated once, and it seemed to me that she meant to draw back. But after a moment she went on, and together they slowly mounted the incline.

I turned away. I tried to tell myself that there

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

was no significance in this walk of theirs. Whatever it was he wished to say — up there on the broad summit of the Wall where they could walk and talk in quiet, removed from the turmoil of the city — certainly she had a right to listen if she chose. He had been annoying her persistently. She was not the sort to run away from anything. She was unafraid. Perhaps by facing him and hearing him out she would dispose of him once and for all.

But I did not succeed in imposing this attitude of mind on myself. And I am going to tell what followed. It marks the lowest point to which this strange new self of mine has sunk — as yet. It must be told.

I walked like mad the whole length of Legation Street — a mile. Perhaps I ran. I don't know. I rushed by the Wagon-lits Hotel with no more than a glance. I did not seem to care that Crocker was in there and might soon emerge. I did not seem to care about anything. I was all empty — life was laughing at me for all the years I had taken it so seriously and so hard. Yet, empty and purposeless as I felt, the forces that keep at me so, these days, were overwhelming me.

I went out through the German Gate saying — aloud — “What do I know about this woman?

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

What is she to me? Who is she, that I should permit her to devastate my life!"

Some German soldiers heard me, and laughed.

There I stood, a thin little man, doubtless flushed and wild of eye, laying bare my poor torn heart to the world; and the soldiers were laughing at me.

I hurried away. An empty rickshaw was passing. I hailed it and leaped in. I rode straight to my little hotel. I ran up the stairs. I let myself into my room, and slammed the door shut behind me. I tore open the drawer of the bureau where I had carefully put away the ten cylinders on which Heloise and I had painstakingly recorded the close-interval scales.

I got them out, the ten boxes that I had labeled so carefully. I threw them on the bed in a heap. I stood over them. As nearly as I can recall it now, I laughed at them. For they were hers. She had made them. She had made them for me; and I had held her within my arms. The picture of her there on my balcony, came to me with poignant vividness. And another picture — Heloise, in her chair with her sewing in her lap, singing that difficult scale successfully for the first time, and trilling softly and triumphantly on the last note, while her eyes sought mine. It was all

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

utterly bewildering. Suddenly, from laughing, I had to fight back the sobs that came.

It was then that I tore open the boxes, one by one, and threw the cylinders to the floor and stamped on them. They were merely a waxy composition, not hard to destroy. I did not stop until my floor was strewn with the pieces. And now no longer is there, anywhere in the world, a finely perfect close-interval scale as a standard basis of comparison for the tone-intervals of so-called primitive music. Von Stumbostel will never know of my triumph now. Nor Boag, nor Ramel, nor Fourmont, nor de Musseau, nor Sir Frederick Rhodes. That beastly little von Westfall, of Bonn, can snarl to his heart's content, unrefuted. And the British Museum will never see this great result that might well have crowned my work and my life.

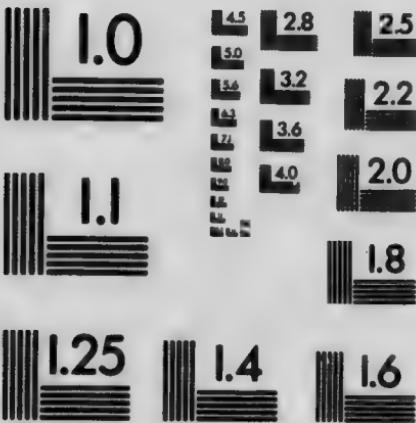
All about the room were scattered the bits of broken cylinders. I stood among them, trying to think ahead. But I could n't think ahead. All I seemed to know was that I could stay no longer in this shabby little hostelry where my life had soared so high and sunk so low.

I cleared a space in the middle of the room with my foot, kicking the pieces of my once precious cylinders aside as if they were pebbles. I drew



# MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



APPLIED IMAGE Inc

1653 East Main Street  
Rochester, New York 14609 USA  
(716) 482-0300 - Phone  
(716) 288-5989 - Fax

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

out my steamer trunk, and opened it; got my clothes from the wardrobe and threw them in heaps on the bed; jerked out bureau drawers and set them on chairs and on the floor where I could reach them.

I was still working furiously at my packing when she came in, alone. I heard her light, quick step in the hall, I heard her unlock her door, and enter her room. Then she locked it again, on the inside.

I stood there, coatless and collarless. I wanted to tap once more at her door. I hesitated over this thought. I resisted it. I fought with it.

Finally I put on my collar and coat, picked up my hat, and rushed out. I could finish the packing later. Certainly, I could n't finish it now, with every nerve tip quiveringly conscious of her nearness, there behind the thin partition and the shrunken door.

If I should find it too hard to come back later, I decided then, I would send a Chinese valet from the other hotel to finish the job for me.

Among the qualities that go to make up the unrest that we call love, it appears that self-absorption plays no small part. Perhaps this selfishness, lying at the root of desire, is the element of positive force in love. I wonder! Certainly, without it,

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

love would be much more nearly a negative thing than it actually is.

It was very primitive, very confused, very petty, this outbreak of mine.

But then, life is that.

And I have destroyed my scales!

It was after eleven — in the morning — when I went away from the *Hôtel de Chine*.

I was angry, bitter. Nothing in the world seemed important except my own feelings.

I knew well enough what I was going to do. There were two or three other shabby little hotels outside the Quarter. But I was going straight to the Wagon-lits. It was twelve o'clock now. I decided to have my tiffin there. Then perhaps I would send a man around to finish my packing and fetch my luggage.

As I walked deliberately into the great, gay hotel, I was in spirit not unlike a man who has awakened from a turbulent dream. For here were the familiar folk of the West. On the preceding evening, when I had first entered this building, the same groups of tourists, business and military men, and diplomats, with their ladies, had been here; but then I had seen them with different eyes. Now they looked natural, as we say. And their

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

voices fell on my ears with a pleasant reminder of home.

I found a chair in the lounge, and sat back to watch the bright, chattering, shifting crowd. I glanced about for Crocker, of course, but saw no sign of him. A little later, just before tiffin, I looked up his box, at the desk. I wanted to ask about him, but feared that the clerk would think I wished to see him. God knows I did n't wish that! It was at this time, I think, that I began to realize the shadowy nature of the curious revulsion of feeling that I had been passing through, on this day. I did not feel so great relief as I had just been telling myself I was feeling. Those vivid mental pictures of Heloise, as I had seen her so often in her room or mine, kept flashing before me. . . . No, I did n't want to see Crocker. I did want to know where he was, and what he was doing. His box told me nothing. There were no letters in it; and his key was not there. But I had no doubt he was still in bed.

I ate my tiffin alone in the big dining-room, seated where I could watch the door. I fortified myself with the latest papers, and tried to believe that it would be pleasant to pass a leisurely hour or two there.

But I was restless. I did n't seem to want to

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

read, now that I had my comfortable chair, and unusually good food. When the coffee came, I drank it at a gulp, and went out.

I stepped over to the desk to pay for my tiffin. I reached into my pocket for my purse. My fingers touched something filmy — Heloise's handkerchief! I could not resist bringing it out, there with the Belgian clerk looking coldly at me, and staring at it — that rumpled little ball of linen and lace. This for a moment: then I paid my bill and walked away.

I went right out to the street. I had to stare again at the little handkerchief. I had to press it to my lips. The rickshaw coolies could see me; but I cared nothing for them, though the tears were crowding into my eyes.

I did not come to my senses all at once. I must have walked about until three o'clock or thereabouts. At least, it was twenty minutes past three when I found myself again in the street that leads from the Italian *glacis* to our little *Hôtel de Chine*. I was humble now, and very sad.

For I had gone pieces this day. I had failed the woman I love. In bitter, jealous anger I had failed her.

I had discovered in myself the meanest of qualities — suspicion. And utter selfishness.

## ANTHONY TH. ABSOLUTE

A dozen times in those hours of my revulsion Crocker might have come to kill her — and I not at hand.

It was not until I entered the hotel and observed the sleepy quiet of the office and lounge that I was reassured. I could not bring myself to go upstairs, for she had made it so heartbreakingly plain that she would not see me. But surely all was well, as yet. Had there been trouble, there would be signs of it here.

I wondered if she had gone out for her customary afternoon walk. This thought bothered me. For then she would be coming back. I could not escape seeing her. Now, I wanted to see her, and I did not want to see her. I seemed to have reached a point, at last, where I knew that I would not go to pieces again. But this was only while I was reasonably sure that I could avoid her. If I were to meet her face to face, to look again into her great blue eyes with the long, long lashes, perhaps to clasp her hand, I knew that I could not be sure of anything. Once that magic were to surge again in my heart, my reason would fly.

Such were the facts of that strange revulsion which pointed out to me for the first time a pitiful flaw in my character. I failed Heloise when her need of me was most desperate. And nothing but

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

luck (as we term it) saved her from the worst possible consequences of my weakness.

It was the first time in my life that I had been put to a rough, hard test. And — the flaw.

I deduce from this fact the conclusion that the sheltered life, with its corollary of so-called right living, permits no true demonstration of character. That fine quality is found in the open, where men (and women) breast the rough tide of life, and blunder, and struggle, and suffer.

I paced our little street, from the hotel entrance to the *glacis*, until twenty minutes of six. Heloise did not appear; so doubtless she was safe in her room. Crocker did not appear; so doubtless he was still drunk, over at the Wagon-lits.

I wondered a good deal about Sir Robert.

Finally he entered our street in a rickshaw. I stood squarely in the doorway of the hotel as he stepped down and paid off his coolie. He looked about him with quick, furtive glances as he crossed the walk. His eyes were tired, but beady and bright. There were spots of color on his cheeks.

He had to pass so near to me that he could have touched me. I was staring right at him, expectantly. I wanted to meet his eye, to make him meet mine.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

But he cut me. It was the direct cut, such as only an Englishman can administer.

He went on into the building. I hesitated but a second, then turned abruptly and followed him.

He was at the desk, getting his mail.

I came to a stop behind him, and fingered a magazine that was on a table there. It was my intention to make him speak.

The manager came forward from an inner office, brushing his clerk aside. He said something — several sentences — in a low voice and with a hesitating, apologetic manner; then he handed Sir Robert a paper.

The old man adjusted his monocle, lifted the paper, and read it. Then, slowly, he crumpled it in his unsteady fingers and dropped it on the counter.

"You contemptible scoundrel!" he said, with one sharp glance at the manager.

"But it is that I do not want to turn out the lady — to the street," the manager struggled to explain.

But Sir Robert walked away — into the lounge, where he beckoned a waiter and deliberately ordered his tea.

I stood there for a few moments, I think, quite motionless. Was it possible that —



It was Heloise's bill for two weeks



## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

I stepped up to the desk, and asked for the manager. He came out to me.

"I heard you speak of turning out a lady," I said, looking straight at him. "What did you mean by that?"

He hesitated, then reached into his pocket and produced that identical crumpled ball of paper that Sir Robert had let fall on the counter. He spread it out, and smoothed down the wrinkles. "Perhaps," he murmured, "I have made the mistake. It is too bad to think that the lady she can not —"

I snatched up the paper. It was Heloise's bill, for two weeks.

I paid him right then and there — in gold.

He muttered a jumble of apologies.

I cut him short. "You *have* made a mistake," I said. "Now have the kindness to keep your head shut, will you!"

He bowed himself back into his little den. I turned and found Sir Robert looking straight at me, from his chair. I must admit that his eyes never wavered. And there, for a long, tense moment we stared at each other like the enemies we were. Then I walked out to the doorway to resume my watch.

What a fox he was! Even in his desperate, terror-stricken pursuit of Heloise, he had deftly

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

avoided entangling himself before an outsider. And he had extricated himself, as if by instinct, from the slightest financial risk in the matter. I knew then that this old man would give nothing save as a *quid pro quo*.

In a moment more I quite forgot him. I stood there in the little street, looking at the shopkeepers in their doorways sipping their bowls of tea after the rush and turmoil of the day. But I don't think I saw anything clearly; I remember some such scene, and know that I must have observed it at this time.

For the thought of Heloise, penniless in this sorry, shabby place, was almost more than I could endure. Though I had wondered, and even worried, about her finances, somehow I had not thought of her condition as utterly desperate.

I don't know what she would say — or think; for she would say little — if she knew that I had paid the account for her. Even yet, I have not told her. I have got to tell her, but I see that it is going to be difficult. I must think out some way of broaching the subject. Perhaps I shouldn't have done it. Or perhaps a more tactful man would have found some less crude way of managing it. I can't say as to this.

Standing there, I suddenly remembered that

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

odd little scene of the preceding evening that I had witnessed from the stairway — the manager in her room talking to her, and Sir Robert outside, at his own door, listening.

He had known of this trouble. His knowledge of it had held him here to annoy her with skilfully aimed persistence. She had been unwilling to come to me. She had not known what to do. She had been helpless.

Oh, the thoughts that raced through my mind as I stood there in the doorway! And the pictures that my heated fancy contrived! I wanted to rush up those stairs and make her speak to me. It was all I could do to fight this impulse. I knew that I was going to do this, sooner or later; but I knew too that I could hold out a little longer. For I must not thrust myself, an ungoverned, passion-shaken man, into her trouble.

If Sir Robert had gone up, I am sure I would have followed him. But he did not. He sipped his tea for a long time, and nibbled his toast. I could look in through the doorway and see him. Then he tried to read. Then he wandered about the lounge, like a tortured ghost of passions that had died with his prime. Once he came to the hall and stood irresolute at the foot of the stairs, twisting his monocle in his shaking fingers.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

But then he saw me standing there like a sentry.  
And he walked hurriedly back into the lounge.

So the time dragged on. When I looked again at my watch it was five minutes of eight. It was time for Sir Robert's dinner. Few things in life, I knew, were more important to him. Perhaps he would go over to the Wagon-lits for it. Any-way, unless he had some definite knowledge of Crocker's whereabouts, he would not wait about here much longer, for he was a coward; his assurance had been undermined by the consciousness of his own guilty intentions. That much I had seen twenty-four hours and more earlier, when he warned me about Crocker.

But he did not go to the Wagon-lits. He went, instead, into the dingy dining-room of our own hotel. And I kept my watch, out there at the street door. A little later it occurred to me that I had seen no tray going up the stairs.

I stepped in and ordered the manager to send up a waiter to number eighteen. There seemed to be no use in holding back now. So far as that manager was concerned, I had crossed the line—both for myself and Heloise. And he, at least, would say nothing. His poor mind was already full of such unpleasant secrets as he imagined mine to be.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

The waiter went up, and in a moment returned.  
The manager stepped out to me.

"The lady she does not answer to the waiter's knock," said he, all concern and deference.

I could only bite my lip, and try to think, and then turn away from him.

Pretty soon Sir Robert came out from the dining-room, and made straight for the stairs. He was walking slowly and rather uncertainly. It seemed to me that he was a good deal bent. When he reached the hall, I observed that the spots of color had left his cheeks. His face, indeed, was pasty white.

I stepped inside and tried to make him face me. But he cut me again, magnificently. He reached for the railing, and slowly mounted the stairs.

Deliberately I followed. So we went up to the second floor — he fumbling along just ahead of me, I holding back.

I stood behind him while he unlocked his door. But weak as he was physically, he never once let down in his attitude of ignoring my existence. I am not so certain that he is a coward. I am certain only that the human creature is extremely complex, extremely difficult to classify and formulate.

He went in, and made an effort to shut the door

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

in my face. But I caught it on my elbow, and followed him in, closing it behind me.

He sank into a chair, and looked up at me. Now, at last he had to speak.

"Well—" he asked, "what is it? Why do you come in here?"

I kept my voice well in hand. Heloise must not hear this.

"To ask you several questions," I replied. "Where is Crocker?"

"At the Wagon-lits — still drunk."

"You know this?"

"I saw him, only a few hours back. Went to his room, in fact."

He was speaking, I have realized since, with some physical effort; but his mind was steady enough. He seemed to be simply making the best of it, since he had been unable to keep me out by force.

"He is not likely to be up and about before the morning?" said I.

"He is certain not to. But they stopped selling him liquor this afternoon. I learned that from the manager. So he will be nervous to-morrow. And probably dangerous. Undoubtedly dangerous." His eyes flitted about the room, and then I saw that his baggage, all packed excepting one

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

bag, was still there. "So I will leave him to you. I take the Tientsin train early to-morrow. And alone, I regret to add."

This stung, but I held myself in control.

"I had hopes that the lady would leave with me," he added. "I would have done very well by her. Extravagantly well. For she is, I may say, a person of unusual charm. But now, of course, that you are openly paying her bills, I leave the field to you."

I kept my hands close at my sides, and stood straight there before him.

"I gave you some advice the other day, my boy," he continued. "Bear it in mind. The woman is helpless. I confess I don't see what on earth she can do. For she is a highly impractical little thing. She has very little idea of the value of money. I offered more than I had any business to — offered to send her back to Europe and help her along with her studies. It seemed the only way to reach her, don't you know — the line of her ambition, and therefore her weakest point. I used all the familiar arguments. And God knows most of them are true enough — that private morality is of no consequence in an operatic career, that a woman need conform to suburban standards only if she is seeking a suburban

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

success. I pointed out notorious episodes in the lives of great women performers whom we all admire, women of unquestioned position. But do you know, my boy, not one of these arguments appeared to reach her at all. She is to me, I must say, an extraordinary contradiction. Here she is, deserted and destitute on the China Coast, where a woman can not travel alone for a day without advertising herself as a marketable commodity; and yet, so far as I can see, she is, in a sense, a good woman. Really, it was n't until I pointed out the wreckage she was making of your life, and the service she could do you by accepting my money and getting away from you, that she would so much as listen to me — ”

He looked up at me, and his voice trailed off into silence.

But I did nothing, except to say, in a voice that I knew to be my own because he was no longer speaking and there was certainly no other person in the room —

“ So you talked of me! ”

He bowed.

“ You are frank, Sir Robert. ”

He waved his hand. “ Why not? ” Then he went on. “ The most puzzling point in her puzzling story is that part relating to the other man —

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

the one that brought her out here. She makes no effort to justify her actions, as we expect a woman to do when she has gone wrong in the eyes of men."

"Oh — so you asked her about that?"

"Yes." He indulged in a wry, fleeting smile. "I brought up everything — used all my logic, Eckhart. I was, like you, a fool to want her at all with that crazy husband so close on her heels; but I did want her, and I worked hard for a few hours." He sighed. "Do you know, all she has to say of the man with whom she traveled from New York clear to Peking, is — 'That was a dreadful mistake. I was n't the sort of woman he thought me.' And when I spoke sympathetically of his cruelty in deserting her, she quietly informed me that he did nothing of the kind. . . . What do you say to that, my boy? *She left him!*"

He was quite warmed up to his story now. He even chuckled.

"What do you say to that, young man? This exceedingly attractive young person, very nearly penniless, quite unhampered by practical experience, turns the man off, refuses his money, and starts out to face life — in Peking — alone and without so much as a plan of action! It is pitiful,

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

of course. It is tragic. But it does stir the fancy. Now, does n't it?"

"I don't know," I said slowly, "why I don't beat you to death."

His face, I thought, grew even whiter. But his eyes met mine.

"I know why," he replied deliberately. "Because a gentleman does not commonly enter the room of another gentleman for any such unmanly purpose."

I bowed a sort of assent to this. He really had me there.

"Besides, Eckhart," he added, "while you have a perfect right to call me a fool, you certainly can't say that, as life runs, my attitude has been unnatural. The woman deliberately broke with life. As a result of her own acts, she is now outside the pale of decent society."

"Outside — where we men are," said I, very sad and bitter.

He sniffed, rather contemptuously. He thought my observation too obvious.

I added, as I turned toward the door —

"And at that, after your own tribute to the essential fineness of her character, your notion of 'decent society' sounds highly technical to me, Sir Robert. Good-by to you. You will forgive

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

me for saying that I shall be very glad when you are gone."

He did not reply. But as I laid my hand on the knob of the door, I caught a low exclamation behind me that seemed to have both pain and surprise in it.

I looked back. He had sunk down in his chair. One side of his face, the left side, had twitched upward so that there was a distinct slant to his mouth and an observably deep, curving line extending from the left lower corner of his nose.

"Are you ill?" I asked, after a moment.

He slowly shook his head. "Something snapped, I thought," he replied, rather huskily. "But I am all here, evident!"

"I shall be glad to call a doctor."

"Thank you — it is quite unnecessary. If you will be so good as to have the manager send me a competent body servant, it will be sufficient."

"But you may need medical attention."

"Then it will not be difficult to reach McKenzie, over at the Legation. I won't trouble you further — beyond that matter of the servant."

I bowed and went out, closing his door behind me.

I stood there for a moment in the hall. It seemed a very long time since I had seen Heloise

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

or heard from her. And now, thanks to that old man, I had a new set of mental pictures to touch my spirit, and stir me, and rouse feelings so subtle, so haunting, so poignant, that I could hardly bear them. Yet, I thought, these are my new mental companions, these thoughts and feelings and partly distinct, partly elusive, mind pictures, and it is with them I have got to live for the rest of my life.

I listened. She was in there, surely, behind that closed dcor. The transom was closed, too. I could hear no sound.

I decided then to make her speak to me. And it seemed to me that now I could give without asking.

My hopes for myself were running as high as that — to give without asking, and to reassure her poor tortured spirit by so appearing and acting that she would know, through her fine intuition, that I had risen to this point.

I ran downstairs and told the manager of Sir Robert's request. I also suggested that in my judgment medical care was indicated. He looked puzzled, and a thought worried, that little French manager; as if unable to determine whether I had killed Sir Robert or had suddenly become his friend.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

Then I came back upstairs and entered my own room. I turned on the light.

I stepped softly to the shrunken door, and listened. For a moment I thought I heard nothing; then my heart gave a leap, for her bed began creaking as if she were tossing restlessly upon it.

She was in her room. However desperate, however tortured of spirit, she was there!

She made a sound — a sort of moan.

I tapped on the door.

She was silent.

I opened the door an inch. Her room was dark. Without looking in, I placed my mouth close to the opening, and said —

“ Oh — Heloise! ”

That was all. I had thought to conceal my own emotions. I had thought to speak gently, kindly — in a way that would make her feel me there as a steady, helpful friend. But my voice suddenly choked. And all I could say was, “ Oh — Heloise! ”

She did not reply.

I waited there. I felt that I must not intrude. I could not think just what would be best to do.

Then she tossed again, restlessly. And she moaned, with a sort of muffled shudder in her voice, as if she had set her teeth and was fighting with

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

all her waning strength to keep from making a sound.

I could n't stand it. I opened the door. The light from my room fell across her bed and showed her there, her lovely arms outside the coverlet, her dark hair, in a thick, long braid, lying on the pillow and across her shoulder.

Still she did not speak. I entered (thinking vividly of that first time that I had ventured unasked into this dingy little room that was the only place in the world she could call, even momentarily, her own). I went straight to the bed. I took one unresisting hand in mine, and gazed down at her during the moment that my eyes were accustoming themselves to this dimmer light.

She rolled her head weakly around on the pillow, and looked up at me.

Then I saw that she was very white. Her eyes were shining at me out of great, dark circles. There were marks of pain, of physical suffering, on her dear face, such as I had never before seen there. Hitherto she had merely been sad.

I sank down, sitting on the edge of the bed. I could not say anything. I stroked her wrists. I gently smoothed her forehead and temples and cheeks. Her skin was cool, almost cold, to the touch.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

Her great eyes sought mine. Weak and ill as she was, I knew that she was looking into my soul, and studying it, perhaps wondering about it.

At least, now, there would be no more occasion between us. I felt that. Whatever she might say to me, when she should feel able to talk, would come directly from the most sacred depths of her consciousness. We had never been so close. Even at that sad moment, the thought thrilled me.

I had to turn away.

Then I saw that her bureau, over which she and I had once expended, ages ago, an absurd amount of energy, had been moved, and stood squarely across the hall door.

Now, why had she done that?

I was still stroking her forehead and temples, trying to control the fever that was in my veins, trying to think clearly.

I looked again at her.

She made an effort to smile at me. There was infinite sadness in that effort.

Suddenly she turned toward me, on her side, hiding her face from me, pillowng it on my hands, which she held close, if weakly, with her own cold hands. And again that low, pitiful sound escaped her lips.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

"I wanted to die," she breathed. "I wanted to die! Why did n't you let me die!"

My heart stood still.

I turned her face to mine, and b<sup>reath</sup> low over her.

"What have you done?" I asked her.

She shook her head, almost convulsively, and tried to hide her face again.

"What have you done?" I asked.

I looked more closely at the bureau, dreading what I might see upon it. But there were only the familiar little toilet accessories that I had seen there before. My eyes searched about among them, while I sat there on the bed, while she continued to press my hands, with her own cold ones, against her face.

Then I looked down. On the floor, almost at my feet, was a glass with a little water in it. Near by was a small brown medicine bottle, with beaded edges. The cork was out. A little cotton lay by it.

I picked up the bottle, and turned it over.

It was labeled:

"Poison." And beneath this, "Morphia,  $\frac{1}{4}$  gr."

"Heloise!" I cried. I made her look at me. "Heloise, child! You don't mean — you have n't —"

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

Her head moved between my hands; and I knew she was trying to nod an affirmation. Then she struggled again to turn her face from me, but so weakly that I held it there without much difficulty. I fear I was employing more strength than I realized.

"How much did you take?" I said. "Tell me — quickly."

"I don't know," she whispered. "The bottle was full. I took them all."

"That is impossible," I argued, foolishly. "Two grains would have killed you. One grain, even."

"I took them all," she repeated. "I wanted so to die. I thought for a while that I was dying. Then I became dreadfully ill. I have been so ill, Anthony!"

All at once a note of relief had come into her voice — as if it meant something to her, after all, to have me there with her, and to be able to talk with me.

I felt that. But it was not the time to think of myself.

I stood up. But she clung to one of my hands, and I had to bend a little. I was trying to think — What do they give for morphine poisoning? What are the antidotes? . . . Stimulants, surely.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

I had some strychnine in my little medicine-chest. I gently withdrew my hand, and went into my room to look for it.

I felt uncertain about this treatment, for I am no physician. But it might be that there was no time to lose. She was weak, and extremely nervous. The coldness of her hands led me to believe that at some moment after she took the drug her heart action must have all but stopped.

Standing there, in my disordered room — for my steamer trunk was open, my clothes still lay in rumpled heaps on the bed, the cluttered bureau drawers stood about on chairs and on the table — I made up my mind to give her the strychnine. I did not realize then that there were physicians to be had. I felt only our remoteness from the conveniences of civilized life, here in this little hotel in the Tartar City.

It would doubtless have been better to administer the stimulant by the hypodermic syringe. But I had none. So I refilled her glass with water, gave her two of my strychnine pills, and raised her head while she sipped the water.

I do not recall now whether or not she resisted this treatment. I think she did, a little. But she was so completely exhausted, in body and spirit,

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

by all she had gone through, that she really could do nothing but follow my instructions.

Then I rang for a boy — from my own room. It was getting pretty late in the evening; but I made him fetch me a large pot of black coffee.

I lifted her, and slipped the two pillows behind her that I had brought in from my own bed, and made her as nearly comfortable as I could. When the coffee came I poured out three cups of it, one after another, and stood over her while she drank them. She protested, every moment, but I paid no attention to her words, just held the cup to her lips until it was empty and then refilled it twice.

This done, I put the tray in my own room, and did what little I could to make her room more attractive to the eye. I moved the bureau from the hall door to its place against the side wall, the place it had occupied ever since she and I had moved it for the last time away from the door that connected our rooms. I even straightened out the various articles on the bureau.

And all this time I felt her great, weary eyes following me about the room. She was distinctly relieved, I thought, at the sharp way in which I had taken command of her life. Poor child, she had tried hard enough to end that life. She had passed

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

through the valley of the shadow. And now, cheated yet relieved, she leaned on me.

Since that hour my mind has dwelt on the horrors she must have lived through that day. (She did not finally take the morphia until sometime after five in the afternoon.) She says nothing about the day; and of course I ask no questions. But she was there in her room through the noon hours and all the afternoon. And when I asked her if she slept at all the preceding night — the night that I sat up, without even undressing — she said no. . . . But I think it is better for me not to dwell on this.

I walked over to the window to let the night air in on her, and perhaps also to think.

Suddenly I recalled that there was a telephone downstairs. How stupid of me not to have thought of it before!

And Sir Robert had spoken of a physician at the British Legation. I should have remembered that! But on second thought, I could not bear to think of calling in Sir Robert's man.

However, medical advice of some sort I must have. I knew nothing of the action of morphia on the system. She might be sinking at this moment.

I stepped back to the bedside and stood over her.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

She did not look worse to me. It might have been only the temporary effect of the strychnine and coffee, but there certainly appeared to be a hint of color in her cheeks.

"I am going downstairs to telephone for a doctor," I said, taking her hand. Her fingers twined weakly around mine, and clung a little. "Will you lie quietly here until I come back?"

"I don't want a doctor," she breathed. "I'm much better."

I paid no attention to this. "And will you promise me never to — not to" — my voice was unsu- ly — "not to take any more of that dreadful stuff?"

"I could n't," she replied, in that maddeningly unsatisfactory way of answering serious questions that women appear to have. "There is n't any more."

I think I compressed my lips over this. But I went right downstairs.

The manager was in his little den behind the hotel office. I beckoned him out, and asked about physicians.

His eyes sought my face. But I told him nothing.

With his assistance — for the telephone service of Peking is not that of New York or Chicago —

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

I called up an English medical mission that was not far from the hotel.

The head physician had gone to bed. At first they refused to disturb him. But I insisted.

It was half an hour before he arrived. I drew a chair to Heloise's bedside, talking with her and rubbing her head and her forearms while we waited.

She gave every evidence of rather rapid improvement. She was weak, of course; and so nervous that her body would twitch for no reason, and the slightest unexpected sound would give her a start. But the pupils of her eyes, that had been very small, were widening out to something like their normal size. And behind the gaze that she kept turning to me and the occasional faint suggestion about her mouth of a gentle but sad and enigmatic smile, I felt, even then, that she was doing some sober thinking.

After a time she said:

"I have clung to one thought to-day. My life has been all a blunder. But it has helped a little to know that you have your scales, Anthony—and that you would n't have them except for me."

I went limp at this. For it had made me feel sound and strong to be caring for her, and now

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

her words plunged me back into the depths of that dreadful day. I dropped my chin on my hands.

"Anthony!" said she. "What is it?"

I could only shake my head.

"But you have the scales, Anthony?"

I shook my head again.

She came up on her elbow — all weak and shaking. She had on that gray silk kimono that I love — the one with the wistaria blossoms embroidered on it. I felt her eyes searching my thoughts, and I could only look at the soft gray blossoms on her sleeve and study out the pattern.

"Anthony," she was saying, with something of that musical "edge" in her voice — "Anthony, what have you done?"

I told her. I even moved my chair aside and let her gaze past me and through the open doorway into my room, where she could see bits of the broken cylinders scattered about the floor.

Was I pleading the cause of my love for her, of my — yes — of my desire for her, in thus giving way to the unexpected impulse to have her see those broken cylinders with her own eyes? God pity me, I do not know! All I am sure of is that I suddenly wanted her to know all about those miserable, weak hours of mine. And a strange, trem-

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

ulous hope was fluttering to life in my heart. It was possible that we should again work together, she and I!

This hope fluttered and grew. I felt my heart beat more quickly, and a touch of that odd dryness in the throat that comes to me when Heloise and I are close, when I touch her hand or her sleeve and know at the same moment that she is thinking of me and that her feelings are in some mysterious way interwoven with mine.

I recall that I moved forward on my chair. I moved still farther, and sat on the edge of the bed. I slipped my arm behind her head. I drew her lovely, dark head against my breast. I bent over and kissed her fragrant hair and rubbed my cheek against it.

I was stroking her hair and her soft cheek. I bent lower and kissed her forehead. Then I kissed her cheek.

I could not help it. I did not know I was going to do it. I know now that she had stopped resisting before this. She let me kiss her.

Slowly this fact made itself felt in my mind and in my heart. She had let me kiss her, but she had been unable to respond. And I remembered what she had said, hours or years ago, and the poignant sadness of it —

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

"Something has died in me. I don't believe I can ever love a man again."

I lowered her head against the pile of pillows. I held the thick braid of her hair for a moment, then let it fall over her shoulder. I looked into her eyes, hoping against hope that I might find a responsive light there.

Then I sank back on my chair, and covered my face with my hands.

She reached out and laid her hand on my arm.

For a little time we sat that way. I could not look at her. I could not say anything. I was glad of the gentle touch of her hand.

It was she who broke the silence.

"Oh, Anthony," she breathed. "If I only could!"

Then we were still again.

But this would not do. I was all egotism — I, who had so wished to help her.

Finally I looked up, and took her hand in mine and stroked it. I even smiled at her. At least, it seemed to me that I smiled.

It was one of those moments that come, in our times of greatest bewilderment, when for a space we see clearly. I suddenly felt that I could think again.

"I don't know what is to become of us, Heloise

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

dear," I said. "You have been close to the end of your life. But I think that you will have to let me help you. For I know now that I shall not want to live unless I can help you. And I shall not leave you alone in Peking. I think you will have to bear with me, at least until I can know that you have got back into the current of your life and work."

She compressed her lips, and her dear eyes glistened. Then I felt her fingers tighten around mine.

"Anthony," she said, low and uncertain, "I would do anything. I would love you if I could. I would go to you without love if I thought I could make you happy, or even help you. You gave me hope by helping me to work. Now, in spite of the dreadful facts of my life that I know so well to be true, you are stirring me to hope again. But all the time I know that the dreadful facts are there, that they will be there when this hope is faded."

"I think," said I, "that we can triumph over those dreadful facts."

"Oh, Anthony," she murmured, "if you only knew how dreadful they are. I wondered before whether I ought to tell you. I lay awake here night after night, trying to think it out — whether I ought to tell you. And then even worse news

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

came. It was too much for me. I gave up, Anthony. It seemed to me, only a few hours ago, that the kindest thing I could do—the kindest thing I could do to you, dear—would be to leave this world. I brought only trouble into it. I thought it would be best to leave it."

She paused. She looked past me, toward the window. Her brows were knit. She was very sober. And her reticence, that I had always felt, was gone. She continued:

"And now I've made a failure even of that. And here I am again, disturbing your life, a burden—"

I leaned forward and took her other hand and looked at her. She faltered. She stopped. I held her two hands firmly. For a moment I considered telling her that I knew her story. Then I knew that I could n't tell her. To-morrow, perhaps; but not now. This hour was hers and mine. Crocker had no place in it. I would not so much as have his name spoken. Further than this, my mind, that had failed me so miserably of late, was working again; and a plan was forming there.

I could not yet see all the way. But from moment to moment I could feel my habitual confidence in my mental processes coming back to me. I was beginning to believe, as I always used to

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

believe, that I should prove equal to the situation as it might develop. And the first thought of renunciation was coming to me like a clear light.

It is obvious, of course (even in this tense moment the fact became reasonably clear to me) that where personal desire is the major premise, logic is impossible.

It was time I came in some degree to my senses.

She must have seen something of all this in my face, when I bent forward and took her two hands so firmly and looked into her eyes.

"Heloise dear," I said, "you are not going to die. You are going to live. For the present you are going to let me help you start at rebuilding your life. You will do this because I love you, and because it is unthinkable that I should not help you. One way or the other"—I repeated this phrase with a peculiar emphasis that, I could see, puzzled her—"one way or the other I am going to help you. It may be that I can never stir you to love me. I shall do this if I can, Heloise; but it may be that I shall not succeed. I am glad that I have"—my voice broke here, so confusing is love—"have kissed you, but I shall not kiss you again. Not again, dear. We shall work this out, however. You and I, one way or the other, we shall work it out."

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

"But Anthony," said she. "You must let me tell you! It is—I am not free—there is—"

"You shall not tell me to-night," I said to her. "You shall tell me nothing. I will not permit it. I will not listen. Free or bound, however dreadful the facts may seem—these things are nothing. Nothing!" My voice rose a little, I fear, at this point. "They can not possibly concern us now, you and me. For one way or the other—"

"But, dear, you don't understand—you don't know!"

"I know enough," said I. "I know all that need concern me and the woman I love more than my life, more than my work, more than everything else in the world and the sky."

She seemed almost to shudder at this.

"Anthony! Please, dear!" She was whispering these broken sentences. "This is all wrong! Please!"

Her voice trailed off. I was still bending forward, all eager and flushed with the great thoughts that were stirring within me. Her eyes seemed almost to cling to mine. She stirred a little, but did not turn away. Her hands were still in mine.

It seemed to me that I ought to surrender her hands and sit back in my chair.

Her eyes were glistening wet, the outlines of her

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

mouth softened from the sadness that had been there. It almost seemed to me that she was drawing me forward with her hands.

Certainly something — some quality of the spirit, perhaps, was drawing me nearer and nearer to her. I knew that my head was bending closer. I thought of resisting, but I did not resist.

My lips met hers.

Her hands slipped out of mine, and slowly — oh, so slowly! — slid up on my shoulders.

Then her arms were about me, and my arms were about her; and our hearts were beating together, very fast.

“Listen!” she whispered, all breathless, turning her head.

Some one was knocking at my door.

I stood up, irresolute. I was bewildered. She looked wan and weak, lying back there against the pillows. I was choking back the sobs that nearly came.

“Oh, Heloise,” I managed to say. “I meant not to. Forgive me, dear!”

But she was not looking at me. “See who it is,” was all she said.

So I went through to my own room, closing the connecting door behind me. I hurriedly brushed my hair, then opened the door.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

It was the physician from the English mission. He was a young man, who looked at me coolly and with some curiosity.

I told him what had happened.

He weighed the morphine bottle in his hand, and pursed his lips over it.

"She must have taken between ten and twenty grains of the stuff," said he, musingly.

"That, of course, is incredible," said I.

He shook his head and replied in a casual tone for which I hated him.

"Oh, no. An overdose will act that way with some people. The system simply refuses to assimilate it or even retain it."

I reported to him what I had done. He then went in and looked at Heloise and asked a few questions.

Occasionally his eyes flitted about the shabby room. Then he would dart little glances at her and at me.

He was a depressing person, this young physician. It was clear enough the impression he got of us.

Heloise felt it keenly. I saw that little droop of sadness coming about her mouth.

Then he told me that I had done about everything he could have done, that she would be all

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

right in a day or so, and that she had had a rather lucky escape.

He left a little medicine, and went away. We both felt that he did not care to have us call him again; and we each knew that the other felt this, though we did not put it in words.

Finally I said, after I had sat by her for a time in moody silence —

“It is very late, dear. I rather think you will sleep to-night, in spite of the coffee and all.”

“Yes,” she said, “I think I will. And you, Anthony”—she caught my hand—“I don’t like to see you look so tired.”

“I shall sleep,” I replied. Then I kissed her forehead, and went into my own room, leaving the door ajar in order that I might hear if she called.

We did sleep, both of us. At least, she says she did. And she looked rested this morning, when I took the breakfast tray from the waiter and carried it to her. She was up, and dressed.

I have realized since that I did not succeed at all in my efforts to hide the serious mood that took possession of me from the moment I woke. She caught it. Every now and then she flashed an odd, puzzled glance at me.

Finally, when we had finished and I had put the

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

tray in my room, she broached the subject that was uppermost in both our minds.

"Before we go any farther, Anthony dear, I am going to tell you —"

I stopped her.

"But Anthony, you must let me speak. You are giving up everything for me, and you don't even know —"

"I know all I wish to know now, dear."

"But this is very important. I can't forgive myself, when I realize that you don't know what I have done —"

I could n't stand this. I simply took her two shoulders in my hands and made her look squarely at me; and I spoke with a sudden uprush of feeling.

"Dear, dear girl," I said, "I'm not interested in what you have done. I am interested in what you are."

"But Anthony, if I am not worthy —"

It hurt me to hear her speak in this way. I was thinking swiftly, bitterly, of certain episodes in my own life. I was thinking of the men I knew, and what they had done. I thought of Crocker and his outrageous code. I thought of my own latest episode of the sort — with the little girl at "Number Nine" — and of the queer masculine

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

twist in my own thinking that had led me to consider myself "unmanly" because I had run away from that girl when she wanted me to stay.

No, I could not bear to have her speak or even think so of herself. So I said, still holding her there before me:

"Men are accustomed to judge women, Heloise. You say that I must know what you have done. Has it occurred to you that I ought to tell you — very humbly, dear — what *I* have done?"

She looked really puzzled at this.

"Why," she said, "I don't know — I never thought. I have always heard that men were — well, different."

"You have heard that — from men," I replied sadly, and turned away.

She caught my arm. "But apart from all that, Anthony," she broke out, "there is one thing that you *must* let me say. You *must*!" She hesitated, caught her breath, then plunged desperately along with it. She was not looking at me now. Her color was rising; and her voice low.

"I have — a — husband —" she said.

"Yes." I interrupted her. "I am going to talk to him now."

I went straight into my own room and got my hat and stick.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

She followed me as far as the doorway. I saw her leaning there, all limp and white.

"You knew!" she was murmuring, as if to herself. "You *knew!*"

"I don't believe I shall need my overcoat," said I, glancing out at the sunlight on the roofs. God knows why I said just that at such a moment. I added —

"Wait here, Heloise. It will be all right. But the time has come to stop drifting. We are going to stop drifting now, you and I — and he. Good-by, dear, for now."

I knew I must hurry. I simply could not talk this out with her now. I felt that I could not endure it. I doubted if she could. Besides it would get us nowhere so long as the question of Crocker himself should be left unsolved to menace our two lives.

I opened the door.

She came on into the room, reaching her hands out toward me. She seemed actually weak, trembling.

"Oh — Anthony!" she breathed, staring at me with something that was almost fascination in her eyes, as if she were now seeing me for the first time.

I could not trust myself at all. I hurried out,

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

closing the door behind me. I ran down the stairs.

It was the thought of the telephone that had come to me with such force on the preceding evening. I knew now that it was not necessary to keep up this terrible waiting for him. It would be easy enough to call him up; then I could go to him and still feel that I was not leaving Heloise at the mercy of a chance visit from him while I was away.

It took a long time for them to get him to the telephone, over there at the *Wagon-lits* — fifteen or twenty minutes, I should say.

Finally I heard his voice.

"How are you, Eckhart?" he said, in the easy, offhand way that men employ one with another.  
"How have you been?"

I thanked God, under my breath, that he was in condition to talk. I simply could not have endured further delay.

"I've been all right," said I. "I want to see you, Crocker, in regard to a very important matter."

"Surely. Any time you say."

"Suppose I come right over there to the *Wagon-lits*."

"All right. I'll wait for you in my room.  
Good-by."

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

“Good-by, Crocker.”

Then I went out into the little Chinese street, and once again headed toward the big hotel in the Legation Quarter.

*April 14, (continued).*

CROCKER opened his door at my knock. He was half dressed, with a quilted gown drawn about his big frame.

He gripped my hand. I permitted this, which was perhaps an odd thing to do; but it came about so easily and swiftly that I could not think how to prevent it without appearing merely childish.

Then I went on into the room, and stood, with some sense of inner tension, while he drew an easy chair to the table and with a paper cutter pried open a box of cigars.

He has changed, even in the fortnight since our parting in the railway station at Yokohama. He is putting on weight pretty rapidly, and his face distinctly exhibits the ravages of drink. It was pale this morning. His eyeballs were criss-crossed with red veins, and there was an incipient puffiness under them. His hands were unsteady, too; I noted that fact when he opened the cigars. And afterward, when he dropped on the sofa and settled back against the cushions, he extended his right hand as I had seen him do

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

once or twice before, back at Yokohama, and make an unsuccessful effort to hold it still. Then he let it fall across his knee, and for a moment stared gloomily at the carpet.

I observed, too, that he was more nervous. He moved with a jerky abruptness. And when he glanced up at me, it was suddenly, with a perceptible start, as if I had spoken sharply, though in reality I had not spoken at all. It made me think of the torturing confusion of moods that was racking his nervous system, and of the merciless voices of unrest that were so evidently whispering every moment at his inner ear. A few days ago I would not have observed his condition with any sympathetic understanding; but now that I, too, have been torn between the exaltation of love and the degradation of jealousy, I can only shake my head in a sad sort of wonder at the mysterious strength of these forces that drive men and women together, and apart, and that linger even after a mismatching and a subsequent separation to stir and bewilder the spirit. . . . Yes, I can, in a way, feel with Crocker now. To live with memories of magical hours passed with a woman one has since lost — elusive, poignant memories, that come in the still hours of night to triumph over the brutal facts of the day that is

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

gone and the day that is to come — this is the stuff of tragedy.

My feelings soared far, as I sat there — all in a moment. I was thinking of strong passions and of elemental things. It came to me, oddly, that I had never really understood certain of the great poems and the greater music dramas. I told myself that I must seize the first opportunity to hear "Tristan" again. I would understand it now. Yes, surely . . . there was the surging, heartbreak<sup>ing</sup> climax of the "Liebestod," for example — it was surging in my feelings now, and in my brain. I could hear the swelling of the violins. And I knew all at once that it was not the mere heartbreak of Isolde and her Tristan that surged and swelled with them, I knew that it was the universal story of man and woman everywhere. Underneath the trivial vulgarity of the daily newspaper, with its commonplace recital of petty dramas and pettier tragedies, I suddenly knew, surge and swell the hopes and dreams and casual disasters of a million Tristans and a million Isoldes. It is men like Crocker and myself, I thought, and women like Heloise, who enact, all unconsciously, tossed helplessly about on great bilows of feeling, the heroic drama of life.

It was the inner man that dwelt on these stir-

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

ring; things. The outer me was declining a cigar, and taking the easy chair, and for a moment letting my eyes wander about the room. It was going to be pretty difficult to broach the subject. I could see that. Yet it had somehow to be done.

There was a bottle half full of whisky on the table, and glasses. Evidently the embargo had been raised. I could not help staring at that bottle for a moment. And, though he did not raise his eyes, I felt that Crocker knew what was in my thoughts.

His suit-case, with the cover thrown back, rested on a chair by the wall. The contents were rumpled about; but among them, right on top, I saw a knife-handle of Japanese lacquer and silver projecting from a lacquered sheath with a silver tip.

He caught me looking at it, sprang up — with an abruptness that made me jump — and slammed down the cover of the suit-case.

Then he came back to the sofa with a short laugh that was plainly designed to cover inner embarrassment, and poured out a good three fingers of the whisky. He drank it neat.

“Have some?” he said.

I shook my head.

“It settles my stomach,” he continued, with an

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

air of apology. "I haven't been at all well lately."

I watched him while he poured out another, and tossed it down.

He lighted a cigar.

"Where you stopping?" he asked. "Have n't seen you around here, have I?"

I shook my head.

"There's another hotel here, then?" said he. And his eyes narrowed craftily.

Oh, yes," I replied, "two or three."

Then I hesitated. But after all, why evade the man? I had come to his room with precisely the opposite intent. So, with a nervous abruptness not unlike his own, I gave him the name of my hotel — and Heloise's. And at the same time I watched him closely to see if it conveyed anything to him.

Plainly it did n't. He merely blew out a long spear of smoke, followed it for a moment with his eyes, and then glanced down at the cigar that he was turning slowly round and round between his fingers.

But he could not sit quietly for any length of time. He got up again, with that same jerky abruptness, and, muttering something about the

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

room being close, strode to the window and threw it open.

He knew that he was acting rather uncivilly, for he turned to me then and said, with a fairly good imitation of a casual manner—"Mind a little air?"

"Not at all," I replied. It was depressing to be talking thus about nothing, knowing so well what was in his heart and what was in mine. But I only mumbled the stereotyped phrase, "Not at all."

He took another drink—neat again. Then he drummed on the table with the fingers of one hand.

If there is one thing above another that I abominate, it is that kind of idle drumming. He made it worse by whistling softly between his teeth a crude song of the streets. I knew that I must keep myself, hand, but could not help fidgeting a little in my chair.

Nervously self-centered as he was, my discomfort quite escaped him, of course. What stopped his whistling and drumming appeared to be a sudden thought that came to him with the tune.

He looked down at me. His eyes narrowed again. He opened his mouth, then abruptly

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

closed it on the words that were so close to utterance.

When he did speak, I felt certain that his question was not the one he had meant at first to ask.

"How's the phonograph business?" he said, and tried to smile.

"It's all right," I replied shortly.

He sat down on the edge of the sofa, elbows on knees, and smoked fast.

"What sort of place is that hotel of yours?" he inquired, after a little.

"Middling. Not so good as this."

"Near by?"

"Not far."

"I suppose any rickshawman would know the way," he mused.

He fell silent again. Then, finally, he put the question that was on his mind, not looking at me, trying to speak casually; but his voice was not quite steady, and I could see the cigar shake in his hand:—

"Have you happened to see a woman over there — young, good looking, rather slender, blue eyes? Could n't say what name she'd be using."

In a flash I knew that this was my opening. And on a great wave of relief — for we had to

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

come to the issue — I leaned back in my chair and said,

“ There is such a woman there. She is using the name of Crocker.” Then I watched him.

I have never seen a man’s face go so blank. His jaw dropped — literally. And his eyes were wide.

I found myself returning his gaze, and nodding rather emphatically. I kept on nodding.

Then I said, holding his eyes with mine —

“ See here, Crocker, I know all about that. You told me yourself. Have you forgotten? ”

Slowly the recollection came to him. “ Oh, yes,” he replied, “ at Yokohama.”

“ And you told Sir Robert at Nagasaki. Have you forgotten that? ”

This seemed to sting him. “ How do you know I did? ” he asked sharply.

“ He told me. We talked you over. I asked him about the legal possibility of placing you under some sort of restraint.”

Curiously, this did n’t anger him. He merely looked puzzled. I wonder if I am doomed to remain ineffectual to the last — an odd, scientific little person, to be humored by the practical men of this rough-and-ready world, even in their least practical moments.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

"I don't get you, Eckhart," said he. "What have you to do with my affairs?"

"At this moment — everything," I answered him, feeling suddenly very sad.

Sad, because it came to me that you can not talk intelligently with another human being without a common language. And this, I knew all at once, Crocker and I did not have. I had thought of many things that I should say to him; now I had lost confidence in all of them, for I realized that the word which means one thought to me would mean another and different thought to him. Each of us would have to interpret words and phrases in the light of his own mental images. And the mental images of each were outgrowths of his individual philosophy of life.

Yes, my arguments, that had, on the way over, seemed so potent, would not do now. In order to reach that mind of his, I must think in his terms and not in my own. And I tried, desperately, to piece together something like his code, as I sat there. . . . That man is a free and dominant creature, half god, half beast; that a small, sheltered section of womankind is of superior, almost divine stuff, designed to comfort and elevate man on his god side, to bear his children and, under his own general government, "keep his

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

house," while the other and greater section of this same womankind is mysteriously of poorer stuff, and is worthy only to do his rougher work at such a wage as can be wrung from him or (in a pitifully matter-of-fact way) to cater to the vices of his beast side — something like this was surely Crocker's sort of philosophy.

I tried to bring myself to realize what this meant. Holding so curious a faith, it was surely natural enough that he should have tried to force poor Heloise's life into his own hard mold of thought and habit. Nor is it unnatural that he should have been outraged when this lovely possession turned in despair from the atmosphere of suppression and inactivity in which he had been so determined to keep her and tried, blunderingly, all wrong, to find an outlet for the fine spirit stirring in the depths of her being.

For this was rebellion. And Crocker, I can see, hates rebellion. His sort always do. He is profoundly a conventional man, even in his vices.

I thought all this in a swift moment, as I sat there, wondering, wondering, how I could say the things that must somehow be said.

Crocker waited as long as he could for me to go on, keeping himself busy with his cigar. Once

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

I thought I detected a furtive expression on his face, as if he dreaded what was to come.

The man was conscious of his own inner weakness, of course. He must have been. Perhaps he remembered telling me of his solemn resolution to give up liquor. Even as this thought occurred to me, he reached out and again tipped that convenient bottle. It seemed to me that there was an extra set to his chin as he did this, a slightly overemphasized casualness that bordered on bravado.

Then he sprang to his feet and moved about the room behind me.

As for myself, I was cool enough. And, once I could hit on the proper beginning to the talk, I felt pretty sure that I could handle the situation. It is evident to me now that the plan I arrived at last night, there in Heloise's room, had cleared the air for me. For I knew — deep, deep in my heart I knew — that I stood ready to give Heloise up. There is selfishness enough in me, God knows. There will be moments of weakness, when the touch of her hand, the blue of her eyes or the shadow of her long lashes on her skin — perhaps even the mention of her name by some common acquaintance — will stir that strange magic that has, in such different ways, torn Crocker's heart and mine. But I believe I shall never again for-

in his  
break-  
haps  
ition  
rred  
con-  
s an  
over-  
ado.  
about  
once  
lk, I  
tion.  
ived  
ared  
my  
loise  
God  
when  
the  
haps  
mon  
that  
eart  
for-



He reached out and tipped that convenient bottle



## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

get that the woman I love, has a life to build, and that the finest duty I have is to help her build it.

I heard a rustling behind me. I turned. Crocker had thrown aside his lounging robe, and was getting into his street clothes. While I sat there watching him, he put on his waistcoat and coat. He put on his hat, pushing it back on his head. Then he busied himself transferring his pocketbook, a handful of small change, some papers and a key ring from the pockets of another suit that hung from a hook on the closet door.

I got right up and stood there, by the table.

"Tell you what, old man," said he, rather apologetically. "I'm all out of sorts. Guess I need the outside air. You don't mind, do you?"

"Yes," I replied, with a ring in my voice that was surprising even to myself. "I do mind. I've got something to say to you."

"Don't talk about that," said he, and walked to the open window, with his hands thrust deep into his pockets.

"But I will talk about it, Crocker. It is what I came here to talk about. And I propose to make you talk about it, also."

He offered no reply; just stood there, staring out the window. I went on. I don't know now where the words were coming from that rushed

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

so unexpectedly to my lips; but I knew, as I uttered them, that before either of us should leave that room he would be taking me seriously.

"There is a woman over yonder, in the Hôtel de Chine," I said. "From your own confession to me, you have followed her here to kill her. There is nobody but me to talk to you, but you are not going to dispose of me so easily. This thing is going to be settled. It's going to be settled to-day — and without any killing. We are not living in that sort of an age, Crocker. Not quite."

"What do you mean — settled?" he muttered, without turning.

"Settled. Just that. And there won't be any murder. You and I are going to arrange terms of separation between Heloise and yourself. Then you are going home. You will leave this city before night. You may go either way — Tientsin or Hankow; it is the same to me. But you've got to go. . . . Will you please sit down here and try to discuss this thing like a rational man?"

Now he did turn.

"I suppose you think you can talk to me like this," he said, with something of a sneer.

"I think just that," I replied. "Sit down,

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

please. We shall see if I can drive a little sense into that fuddled mind of yours."

I stood there waiting. He did not move, except, it seemed to me, to square his shoulders. And there was the same set to his chin that I had noted a few moments earlier, when he was drinking.

"I'm standing a good deal from you, Eckhart," he said. "But after all, I've got nothing against you. You can't be expected to understand these things." This evidently struck him as a happy idea, and he repeated it: "You can't be expected to understand these things."

Suddenly he frowned. "How'd you know her name was Heloise?" he asked.

"How did I know?" I repeated. "I will tell you how. I will tell you much that you yourself do not understand." My voice was rising. I had to struggle to control myself. But I knew that I must, for it was not myself I was fighting for now. "We will not waste words, you and I. We are past that, Crocker — far past it, if you only knew. I have seen" — the words "your wife" had come to my tongue, but I could not say them; it was a profanation even to think of that fine woman as "his" — "I have seen Heloise. I have come to know her. I have seen how sad

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

she is, and what a struggle she has been making to begin doing something with her life. For she has been alone, Crocker—”

“Alone?”

“Yes. She did not stay with that other man. She could not. And she has been struggling all alone.” I fought back the emotion that was breaking into my voice. “I know you both now, Crocker — pretty well. And knowing you both, I can see, oh, so clearly, that she could never, never be happy with a man like you. She has ability, she has spirit, she has what they call temperament. She is an artist. And do you not know, man, that the artist must always be struggling toward expression, that his whole life is nothing but that struggling? You can not make a domestic drudge of such a woman. Of some women — yes. But not of the artist. You tried to do just that. You chose the woman who was beautiful to your eyes, and whose spirit made her most desirable, and then you tried to crush that spirit. I have no doubt she tried to submit, that she fought her own finest qualities, for years, in the hopeless effort to make of herself what you demanded. And then she broke — all helpless, all dependent on you as she was — and risked everything to get away from you because it

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

was worse than death to her to be with you. 'And now you hound her around the world like the savage beast that you are. . . . Good God, man, can't you see that she was *right* in leaving you! Can't you see that it was the finest, bravest thing she could have done!"

I stood, strung up, all blazing with the fire that was in me. I knew I had broken bounds. I thought that now, surely, he would turn on me and fight me; and I did not care. I even thought wildly of settling it all with him then and there, with blows, as men do. For I had the fire and the will within me; while he, with all his height and strength and native vigor, was palsied with that poison that eats away a man's will and leaves but a shell of bluster.

But instead of anger on his face, as I stared into it, I saw only bewilderment. He seemed to be groping after the ends of a new concept, with a mind that had lost something of its power to grasp new concepts.

"Good Lord," he said then, "you're talking as if you were in love with her yourself."

I nodded at him, breathless and deeply solemn. "I am," I said. "I love Heloise, and I shall love her with all my heart until I die."

Perhaps I was guilty of a tactical blunder in

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

giving him this information. He was so evidently not himself that he should have been handled with tact and not further confused. As it stood, I had laid the train of a profounder confusion than I could possibly have foreseen. But I had to say it.

He was still groping to comprehend this amazing thought.

"I don't get you," he said. He was not looking at me now, and seemed to be talking more to himself than to me. "You have n't known her — it's only a few days —"

"It is nearly two weeks."

"But you don't mean" — he fell to walking about the room, and I followed him with my eyes — "you don't mean to say —"

He stopped short, and pondered. Then he turned toward me; and it seemed to me he appeared more like his normal self than at any time since I had entered the room.

"So you're talking for yourself," he observed, coldly.

"No," I replied, "I am not."

"But you tell me you love her —"

"That does not stand in the way of my doing precisely what I insist that you shall do — give her up."

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

"That's easy to say, Eckhart."

"It is not easy to do, Crocker. But Heloise must go to Europe, and take up her study. Her gifts, her hopes, all lead her straight toward opera. Neither you nor I has the right to stop her. It is the instinct for expression, nothing else. You have followed that instinct freely in your own life and work. I have followed it freely in mine. Now let her do the same. Work — the sort of work that will give scope to his own peculiar sort of energy — is what every human being needs. It is, above all, what Heloise needs. It will be her salvation, if anything will. Can't you get that into your head? She does n't need any application of the punitive frenzy that we men call justice. She does n't need the easy moralizing of men like you — and me. She needs *work!* . . . As regards my giving her up — she goes to Paris; I stay here in China for at least two years. If you can think of any way in which I can put more miles than that between us, tell me, and I'll promptly give up my own plans and do it." And I snapped my finger.

Some of my phrases were over his head, I suppose. But he came back at me with a good deal of vigor, ignoring my intense mood: —

"You tell me you love her," he said; "and you

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

talk about giving her up. You don't mean to say that you think she is in love with you?"

This sobered me—suddenly. I felt my eyes drop, and the hot color coming back into my face.

The talk was turning on me in a way I had not precisely foreseen. But after all—it was only fair. Certainly I had shown no hesitation at exposing his hurt places. So I raised my eyes and looked squarely at him, knowing that, though it would be torture, I should tell him the truth as I had been coming to see it during these morning hours.

I shook my head.

"I should hope not!" he muttered.

I paid no heed to him. The thing now was to get the truth out and have it over with.

"There have been one or two moments when I dared think she was beginning to love me," I went on. "But I was reasoning from my hopes. She was alone. She was destitute—desperate. There was no one she could turn to, except myself. She knew that I had come to love her. And hurt and crushed as she was—with all the gratitude that the biggest heart I have ever known could—But what is the good of this! What fault there has been, is mine. She is a buoyant,

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

vital thing, an artist, all spirit and fire. Even in her suffering I can see that. There have been glimpses, when we were working and she could forget for a moment. I am a quiet man, a man of the study, a narrow man."

"Yes, you *are* narrow," he put in.

"She must have variety. She must have stirring moments, strong reactions. She could not possibly be happy with me. And as for you, Crocker — well, we know about that. You are quite impossible. You thought you could possess her. Finding that you could n't, you would kill her."

He winced. I was glad to see it. I must make him wince. I must show him that he was not only a brute, but an absurd one.

He went over to the bureau and rummaged nervously in the top drawer. I could see, in the mirror, that his face was working, in the way it has when he is deeply stirred. Then, after a moment of hesitation, he came back to the table, and with a fair assumption of an offhand manner reached for the whisky bottle.

I snatched it away from him, sprang to the window, and threw it out, hard. I heard it break on the pavement below.

Then I turned and faced him, wondering, with

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

a swift uprush of excitement, what he would do. I had taken him quite by surprise, which was a point for me. His great strength had not enabled him to keep that bottle.

His first expression was a sort of hurt bewilderment. He took a step toward me, but without any particular evidence of anger — more as if he meant to protest.

Next he turned, slowly and heavily, in the direction of the bell. This was over by the hall door. I ran toward it. A chair stood in the way, and I remember throwing it over in my rush. I had my back against the bell before he had got to the middle of the room.

He just stood there, trying to think. Then, abruptly, he turned back, dropped on the sofa, and buried his face in his hands.

I came across the room, as far as the table, and stood over him until he lifted his head. He was evidently fighting to keep from going to pieces. And his pride was not yet wholly gone, for he said —

“ See here, Eckhart, I’m not feeling well at all. Just let me ring for a drink, and I’ll talk with you. I will. I’ll talk. This thing has driven me wild. But you’re right enough, I suppose. Just push the bell, will you? The thing has got to be set-

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

tled. We'll settle it, you and I. If you think there's really any show for her, on her own, I'll be reasonable. It's been the thought of that fellow—of other men—Oh, God!" His face dropped again on his hands.

It was at this point that I began to feel discouraged over the prospect of arriving at any real settlement of the business. The man could not be counted on to remain in the same state of mind for two consecutive hours. I told him, in good round language, that he could not have another drop of whisky; and he exhibited self-respect enough (for the moment) to stop his whining.

Then for a little while I just sat on the edge of the table and looked at him. This was Heloise's husband. My spirit revolted at the thought. Her husband! The crude law under which we live actually gives such a man "rights" over that fine woman. It was unthinkable. And it was so.

"Come out with it," I heard him saying. "What's your proposition?"

I had to think quickly. For this, after all, was the opportunity I had been so desperately seeking. I must talk straight.

"You are to let her have a divorce. If I know her at all, she will not accept alimony—"

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

"Stuff!" said he. "Did you ever see anybody that would n't take money!"

They were as far apart as that, those two. I pushed right on—"but she will have to accept something. A lump sum, say, on the ground that you have held back her training and limited her immediate earning capacity. I think, if that point is made very clear to her, she will be reasonable about accepting enough to carry her through her two or three years of study and the getting up of a repertoire. I would not ask her to agree to more than that. Not from you."

There, that was plain talk enough, surely, even for Crocker!

He took it pretty calmly. In fact, I am not sure that it was n't something of a relief to his hard head to get down to what he would call "brass tacks"—meaning money, and the traffic in money.

"That's your proposition?" he said.

"That's my proposition."

"And when do you want an answer?"

I must admit that he surprised me here. "Why," I replied, "now. On the spot."

He shook his head.

"No," said he. "You are asking me to agree to a plan that would change my whole life."

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

"For the better!" I interrupted eagerly.

"Perhaps," said he. "Do you think I have traveled from New York to Peking for the purpose of changing my mind in one minute, because you ask me to?"

He had stiffened up, as he sat there, and was talking, all of a sudden, quite like a responsible business man. Whether this change was merely a momentary outcropping of self-respect, or whether there was man enough in him to bring that drink-fuddled brain so swiftly under control, I could not imagine.

"What else can you do?" I asked, as quietly and reasonably as I could manage. "At this moment you seem more like your real self, Crocker, than at any other time since I came in here —"

"I'm myself, all right," he broke in gruffly. "Never you mind about that. Let me hear your arguments."

"— and you can't sit here, and look me in the eye, and tell me that you seriously consider carrying out the insane purpose that brought you here. You can't, man!"

"Cut that talk out!" he cried angrily. "Stick to your own side of it."

"There is no other side of it, Crocker. You're not going to kill her. She'll never go back to you.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

Your only possible course is to give her up. And my guess is that you 'll show yourself a reasonably good sport."

This touched him. At last I had hit on a phrase that he could understand, in all this ugly talk that I was driving so desperately at him.

"Never mind that, either," he growled.

I stood up, and looked at him. It seemed to me that I had him. Certainly, he was avoiding my eyes.

He jerked out his watch, and stared at it, turning the stem around and around between his fingers.

"It 's eleven-fifteen," he said, then slowly let the watch drop back in his pocket.

He had smoked the last of his cigar. Now he lighted a fresh one.

"I 'll give you my answer at two," he added.

For a moment I did not know what to say to this.

"What 's the matter," he said, in that rough voice.

It was such a voice, I imagined, as he would employ with business subordinates. "What 's the matter? Is n't that reasonable? You 've stated your proposition. I 'll think it over and give you my answer after lunch. If I

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

accept it, I 'll pack up and leave Peking on the first train."

Still I hesitated. He just sat and smoked.

" You know what 's the matter," I replied, finally. I decided to stick to my policy of talking in his own blunt way. " How do I know that you will be sober at two?"

" I 'll be sober," said he. He thought this over, and added, " After all, Eckhart, I suppose you have a right to ask that question. I 'll admit that I 've been making a dam' fool of myself. I 've been drunk ever since I got here."

" Yes," said I, " I know it."

This disturbed him a little, but he went on —

" I 'm glad you threw that bottle out. It was what I needed to bring me to my senses. I 'm all right now. You 'll see. Tell you what I 'll do — I 'll take a cold bath. That always sets me up. Then I 'll order up a lot of coffee with my lunch, and only a light wine." He got up, and stood over me. " There 's my assurance that you 'll find me here, O. K., at two. I 'm not a common drunkard, Eckhart. You 're not a man of the world, and you don't see these things quite as they are. I 've been stewed, that 's all. I 'm through. Now for the coldest bath they 've got." He began stripping off his clothing. " Come right in

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

at two. Don't bother to send your name up."

For a moment I could only look up at him. I must admit that he was convincing. What he said was quite true — disordered as he had been, through passion and drink, he was not yet a common drunkard. There was yet stuff in the man. Besides if, as I was beginning to hope, he really meant to accept my plan, the less than three hours he asked for was a quite reasonable concession to his pride.

I had to make the decision. I did make it.

"All right," I said, "I'll come at two."

He looked straight at me, and held out his hand.

"You've helped me, I think," he said, in a very decent spirit. Then he glanced down at his big hand, and added — "Better take it, Eckhart."

I took it. Then, stirred by doubts and hopes so extreme and so confused that I hardly knew what I was thinking, I went out. The last I saw of him, then, he was throwing aside his under-wear, and exposing a deep chest, with big muscles curving down over the shoulders, and smaller ridges of muscle in rows on either side. And on his face was that set look.

I ran up the stairs (at the *Hôtel de Chine*) and

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

burst into my own room. Then I stopped short, and took off my hat.

For there, by the window — in my room — stood Heloise. She wore a simple but very beautiful frock of her favorite color, blue. It made her look taller, and slimmer, and more exquisitely womanly.

The room itself was changed. She had picked it up, and given it what few cheerful touches she could. On the bureau, in the toothbrush holder from my washstand, stood a spray of white cherry or pear blossoms. I can't imagine where she got them; I did not think to ask, when we were together, for we had so much else on our minds.

On the bureau, also, in a neat little pile, were the pieces of my ten broken cylinders. She had gathered them all and put them there.

It was the first time she had ever tidied up my room like that. It touched me. I stood motionless for a moment, looking about.

"Did you see him?" she asked, very low.

"Yes," said I, still looking about the room, "I saw him. It is going to be all right, Heloise — all right. We are to meet again at two." Then I indicated the white blossoms. "You have made it seem almost like a home."

"Oh — that?" she murmured. "It was hard

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

to wait. I had to keep myself busy." She said it very gently. And it thrilled me to realize that, whatever strange event might come to her and to me, we had at last arrived at a fine spirit of companionship. Just to think that she could do this friendly act, feeling in her heart that I would not misinterpret it or in some crude masculine way take the advantage—I like that, even though I distinctly do not deserve it.

But she was speaking, still in that low voice, but breathlessly, I thought:—

"How will it be 'all right,' Anthony? What do you mean? What have you done?"

I felt that I must be very gentle. But with her, as with that man over yonder in the other hotel, it was the time for frank talk. For as I had insisted with Crocker, her life was her own to live; and I could not go on now without her approval.

I drew my one comfortable chair to the window for her. She took it. Then I explained to her, just as briefly as I could, that Crocker had agreed to consider setting her legally free, on condition that she go to Paris and work out her career independently of myself or any other man.

She heard me without a word, sitting there, her hands folded in her lap. I could not make out the expression of her face. It was grave, of

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

course, but composed — with no sign of the hysteria that I had considered as a possibility. Indeed, I am not certain but what she was rather calmer than I.

When I had said it all, and had paused, looking anxiously at her, she asked: —

“How long have you known about him? Did *he*” — she indicated the room across the hall with a slight movement of her head — “tell you?”

I explained to her that I had been with Crocker on the ship and at Yokohama, and that he himself had talked to me of his difficulties.

This surprised her, I could see, but she made no comment regarding it. Her next question was uttered with hesitation: —

“Was he — did he seem —”

I caught her drift. “To-day, you mean?”

She nodded, with compressed lips.

“He has been pretty bad, but I really think he is sobering up. When I left him, he seemed to have himself under control. And he gave me his word that he would be sober at two, when I go back.”

She seemed to be musing, in a depressed fashion. Then she glanced up, met my eye, and tried to look brighter. “The trouble with him is,” she said, “you can never be sure.”

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

"I know," I replied, "but I could n't refuse to give him three hours — less than three hours. You see, dear, there is no pressure I could bring upon him. I have n't even the advantage of physical strength. And, really, you know, when you come right down to it, my whole position was the weakest possible — I had absolutely no right to talk to him like that."

We fell silent again. Finally she turned squarely around, and leaned against the casement, and gave me her hand. I saw then that there were tears in her eyes, and deep sorrow, but about her mouth there were evidences of a strong determination that explained why the tears did not come.

We looked at each other.

"Tell me," she said, "what becomes of you in this arrangement?"

"Oh," I replied, "I stay here and do my work. There is just one thing I am going to ask of you, Heloise — will you help me make the scales again?"

She looked surprised, I thought; and her mouth twisted into the faintest of smiles. Then she nodded. "Yes," she said, "we will make the scales."

"Don't you see," she went on, "that what you

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

are trying to do brings us closer together than years of ordinary, selfish love-making?"

"Yes," said I, "in a way."

"In every way," said she. "Are you blind, Anthony? Can't you see how you are making me love you?"

I tore my hands away from her. I could not stand it. But my brain was still clear, thank God!

"Heloise — dear!" I cried, "this only makes it harder. We must play fair. We must see it through. If he goes back to America, then you must go to Paris, and I must stay here."

"What if I should refuse to go to Paris?" said she, still looking at me.

"You will not do that," I answered her. "For it is the condition on which he will set you free."

"Then what is to prevent my waiting for you there — one year, two years?"

"You will be too busy to wait — you will be working, growing, changing — yes, you will change. You will not need me then. Your life must not stand still because of a man who loved you away out here in Peking," — I said this as steadily as I could, — "it must go on, and on, and on."

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

"Oh," said she, "you think I would do that. You think I would change."

I nodded. "Life is change. And you are full of life. Sad as you have been, dear, I can see that. I am a narrow man. If you came to me, I would be weak enough to want you by me, in my home. I should want — children. I should want you to be my wife, my helpmate, my —"

"Well . . ." she breathed, with shining eyes.

"No, Heloise, whatever you may think now, I could never forget what I should be shutting you out from, and it would make me unhappy. Don't you see, dear? You must follow your own genius. That is what I am trying to help you do." And I added sadly, "It is the only way out for you, anyway, because it is the only course that he will agree to — if he should agree to anything."

"Oh, Anthony," she said, "is all that true? Is it just the old conflict between one's own personal life and the career that one is drawn to? Don't you suppose I could give my life to helping you and be happy in it — so happy that it would make you happy too? Thinking of those days that we spent working together, it has seemed that way to me. Just to-day it has seemed so."

I shook my head. "You have a great gift in your voice, Heloise. It must be used. It must

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

grow greater. You are unsubmissive, a rebel; which is precisely what an artist must be. You have the spirit of a fine artist. You must cultivate and expand that spirit. There is nothing ahead of you, Heloise, but work — hard, hard work. And loneliness. That is the lot of the artist. But it will bring its compensations. And even the work itself is a great opportunity."

"Oh, yes," she said, "I know that."

"And you must not weaken, dear. You have headed that way — you must go straight on now. And I will live in your success."

"Does it really come down to that, Anthony?"

"It comes down to that. You've got to do it, anyway — you have no choice. I am only bringing up these reasons now because they may help you to think it out."

"Perhaps this is my real punishment," she observed, "losing you just when I have found you." And then the tears came to her eyes again.

"Perhaps," said I. "Perhaps not. If so, it is a punishment for being alive, since, one way or another, every human being must face it. Every life has to be lived, you know, dear. It is hard to live a life — straight through to its end. It is still harder if one fails to live it. . . . And then, this applies to me, as to you. There is no more

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

reason that you should give up the proper direction of your life than there is that I should give up mine and follow you."

"Oh," she said, with a little gasp, "I never thought of that!"

"It is so, Heloise. We are both positive natures. We have each a life to live. Let us try to live them honestly and thoroughly. Perhaps, in doing that, each will one day make the other happy and proud."

We paused. And then Heloise, being a woman, turned swiftly back to the practical aspect of the problem.

"But, Anthony," she broke out, "you don't for a minute suppose that I would let you undertake all that expense for me? You don't really think I would accept it?"

Now it had to come; the money business, that I had shrunk from mentioning when I told her of my talk with Crocker.

I hesitated, then blurted it out —

"He must pay you a reasonable sum to cover that expense."

"Oh — Anthony!" Her eyes flashed fire. "I won't touch a cent of his money!"

"But — but —"

"Not one cent!"

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

Somehow I felt very sordidly masculine as I stood there trying to explain. I gave her the reasons, as I had thought them out — that it was mere justice to recompense her for the time he had forced her to lose.

But my voice began to falter, as I ran on with the jargon; for I saw that she was not listening. She had become very white. She leaned against the casement, all limp and sad, gazing out over the roofs. Her breath was coming more quickly. And I saw her draw her under lip in a little way between her teeth.

My voice trailed off into silence. For I suddenly knew that she was thinking of her own utter helplessness. And as the fact tortured her fine, free spirit, so also it tortured mine. I reached my hand toward hers; then, since she did not see, withdrew it. There could be no help for either of us in that contact — nothing but a deeper confusion. Then I turned and walked away across the room, and sat gloomily on the edge of the bed.

We must have remained silent for several minutes. It seemed an hour to me, as I sat there, brooding, and struggling against the tendency to brood.

Then I heard her step, and her voice; and looked

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

up to find her standing over me. She was actually smiling — a resolute smile.

“Forgive me, Anthony,” she said. And then, before I could exclaim at this, she added, enthusiastically, like the girl she often seems —

“Let’s make the new scales now!”

For a moment I could only look at her, wondering at her astonishing buoyancy of spirit. Then, as she was herself carrying my phonograph to the table and adjusting the horn, I got up — still heavy and a thought bewildered — and brought a box of cylinders.

While I was at this, she walked a few times to the window and back, swinging her arms freely, like a boy, and inhaling deep breaths. Her collar evidently confined her throat, for she tore it open with an unconscious vigor that displaced a hook and sent it flying against the window. She seemed not to notice this. She swung up on the balls of her feet and ran through a number of vocal exercises. It thrilled me to hear again that wonderful voice, with the firm resonance and the fine quality that always, to me, makes her seem something more than woman.

“It’s a wonder I can bring the tones out at all,” she observed, half to herself. “I haven’t sung a note for days.”

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

Next she began running scales; very carefully and precisely, her eyebrows puckered into an intent frown. And I watched her white throat, and round chin, and delicately curving mouth.

She caught me looking at her, and flashed a smile at me. Then, with her eyes on mine, took in a quick deep breath that filled her chest out solidly, and, full voice, broke into the old familiar waltz song from "Romeo and Juliet."

I knew then that I had never really heard her sing before. She saw the surprise on my face, I know, for her eyes suddenly sparkled and sprung away from mine and she flushed with pleasure; but she went right on with the song — sang it clear through, managing the lace-like coloratura work with perfect ease and precision, unconsciously throwing her whole body into the glorious, swaying rhythm of the waltz, and letting out a volume of tone — of sheer, luscious tone, without a particle of "wood" in it — that filled the room, that would have filled the greatest opera house in the world, that throbbed about my ears and set my emotions vibrating in harmony with it and with the mood of the singer that animated it.

When she had done, I stood motionless there. It seemed to me that echoes of that wonderful

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

voice were still floating to my sense-consciousness from every quarter of the shabby little room. I know that I had to look out for a moment at the sunlight on the roofs beyond the window, and myself take in a deep breath that, I fear, was half a sigh.

She was standing by me.

"We must get to work," she said.

I put a cylinder on the machine. First I looked at her and tried to speak, but could not. I don't know what it could have been that I thought I wanted to say. Probably it was nothing more than the inarticulate emotions her singing had stirred, groping for some outward expression in words.

Her eyes were very bright. I motioned her to go ahead.

"You have n't wound it up," she said, and chuckled softly. I can not account for her moods. But, for that matter, I think I chuckled with her.

We made twelve records. I believe they will prove to be even better, on the whole, than the ten I destroyed. So, whatever happens, I have again my close-interval scale; again I have the selfish gratification of knowing that I have been enabled to establish a basis of scientific interval comparison for the use of all students of primitive music. It

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

is Heloise's last gift to me, done in a strange sort of joy that, even to-night, breaks triumphantly through the shadow that lies on her life and mine.

She watched me while I removed the last of the twelve cylinders, and carefully sealed it in its separate box, and wrote the label. Then she said:

"Oh, Anthony, it is so — worth while!"

All I could say in reply — so full was my heart — was:

"Yes, dear. Work is the answer."

And so close were we now, that I knew she did not think my reply inept.

She looked at her watch, then soberly reflected.

"It is half past one, Anthony," she said.

Conscious that I still found some difficulty in talking, she added: "Would it do any good for me to go — with you, or alone?"

"No," said I, shaking my head. "Not now. It would only excite him. And that would help nobody."

"I know," said she. "I hate to be passive, this way. I feel as if I were shirking —"

"You are n't. It will take some courage to do what you must do."

"I know," she said again. "Be patient, keep steady; help you that way. I know, Anthony."

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

It had occurred to me, when I left Crocker in the morning, that, in the event of any actual physical encounter, there would be a quite unnecessary danger to me in wearing my glasses. I thought of this again, now; and going to the bureau I got my spectacle case and slipped it into my coat pocket.

Heloise watched me, but asked no questions. I put on my hat, and took my stick from the corner by the door.

"Good-by, Heloise," I said. I knew that unless we parted swiftly my will would weaken and I should take her in my arms. So I only said good-by, and opened the door.

But she came right forward, and took my hand. Our eyes met. What I saw in hers reassured me. She seemed very steady and strong.

"Anthony," she said, "I have been selfish, and weak. I have made it hard for you. But you can count on me now."

I tried to murmur a protest to this, but she swept on: "I am going to do whatever you decide for me. I shan't make any more difficulties. Now go. God bless you, Anthony."

She dropped my hand, and stepped back.

I stood there and fumbled the door knob. I felt that I was almost certainly going to draw her

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

to me and kiss those wonderful eyes that are the light of my soul.

But she still looked strong.

"I wonder," she said, musingly, "if there was ever, anywhere in the world, a man exactly like you."

Then she turned away. "You'd better go," she said, with a little gesture.

I went then.

Crocker was not in his room, at the Wagon-lits. I knocked several times; then, turning the knob and finding that the door was unlocked, walked in and looked around.

I was about to leave when the thought of that sheath knife came to me. It was an unpleasant thought; but once it had got into my mind I could not, it seemed, get it out. I stood there in the middle of the room, thinking about it. The suit-case was still on the chair by the wall, closed.

I took a step toward it. Then another. Then, suddenly conscious of my weakness, I went over to it and threw back the cover.

The knife was not there. I rummaged through the garments and the odds and ends that filled the suit-case. But the knife was gone.

I rushed out of the room and ran the length of

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

the corridor. I hurried down the stairs; looked about the office and lounge; went to the bar. There was no sign of him.

I was turning away from the barroom door, when I realized that a fat man was beckoning to me from a table by the opposite wall. He was sitting alone, an empty liqueur glass before him. Across the table was another empty glass.

He was beckoning violently, with his whole arm. I had seen that round face somewhere. Then I remembered. He was on the ship with us, crossing the Pacific—the vaudeville manager from Cincinnati—played fan-tan all the time. I never did know his name. He wore a genial grin now. Perhaps he would have some information for me. At least, I could ask him. So I crossed over.

He wrung my hand. "How's little Mr. Music Master," he cried. "Sit down. Oh, sure you can—sit right down there!"

I looked at my watch. It was ten minutes of two. I had said that I would be at Crocker's room at two. It was pretty important that I should keep my word. Why could n't I think more clearly? He might be somewhere about the hotel, of course. If only the knife had n't disappeared! Suddenly I wanted to rush back upstairs and look through that suit-case again. The knife might have

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

slipped down one side. Yes, he might have done that in getting something else out of the suit-case. . . . Come to think of it, I had n't looked in the dining-room!

Then I heard what the fat vaudeville manager was saying:

"Remember the Port Watch? Big fellow — walked the deck so much — and kept a sort o' slow bun sizzling all the time? Well —"

"Have you seen him?" I asked quickly.

"Sure, right here. Not five minutes back. Had a couple of drinks with me. But say, I don't think he knew me. He acted funny — walked and sat very erect — looked solemn and did n't say much."

"Which way did he go?" said I, trying to appear composed. But I felt him looking quizzically at me, as if saying to himself, "Well, here's another of 'em."

"Did he have his hat?" said I, on the heels of my other question.

"No. I think he went up to get it. Funny thing. I did n't make out what was the matter until he pulled out a big knife — in a lacquered sheath, it was — and said — what was it he said? — Oh, yes — 'They pretty near put it over on me, but I'm too smart for them.' That was it. He

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

whispered it, real mysterious — 'They pretty near put it over on me, but I'm too smart for them.' Do you know, he made me feel damn uncomfortable. I think the man ain't safe."

I listened to all this, in a way. At least, I seem to recall it now, word for word. But I was trying to decide whether to go upstairs on the chance of heading him off there, or to hurry directly back to the *Hôtel de Chine*.

I decided on the latter course. I think the vaudeville man had just about uttered the last sentence recorded above when I turned and ran out of the room. He must have been puzzled.

Yes, I ran. One or two of the drinking crowd shouted after me, I think. I ran down the corridor, through the lounge, and out to the street. I remember that two Chinese hall boys stood gaping as I passed. And parties of tourists looked up from their after-tiffin coffee and their drinks — always the drinks.

I leaped into a rickshaw, and called —

"Two piecee coolie! Two piecee coolie!" And then, when one brown-legged ragamuffin had picked up the shafts and another had fallen in behind the seat, added, still in a shrill voice, "*Hôtel de Chine* — chop, chop!"

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

It was incongruous, that absurd pidgin-English at such a time.

But it was effective. I have never traveled so rapidly through the streets of Peking. I found two Mexican dollars in my pocket, and held them up, one in each hand.

"Chop, chop! Chop, chop!" I cried again. And the coolies put their heads down and ran with all the strength that was in them.

They pulled up in my shabby little street, with a jerk that nearly threw me out. I sprang down, threw the two dollars on the seat, and ran into the hotel.

Then I stopped short.

For standing by the clerk's desk, looking over the board that hung there with our names — Heloise's and mine — in plain view, stood Crocker. He was peering closely from line to line down the first column of names, guiding his eye with an unsteady forefinger. He stood up very straight, with feet placed a little way apart. From the side pocket of his coat projected the silver tip of the knife handle, beneath which I could see a half-inch of black lacquer.

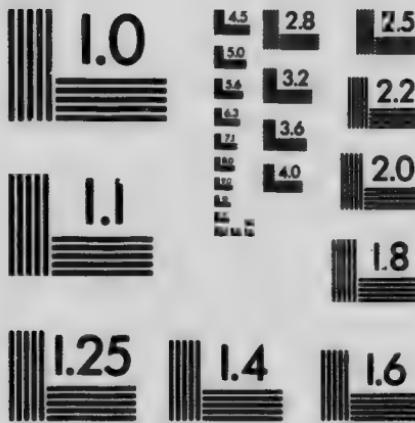
I drew my spectacle case from my pocket, took off my glasses, and carefully put them away.

He was intent on the list of names and room



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



APPLIED IMAGE Inc.

1653 East Main Street  
Rochester, New York 14609 USA  
(716) 482-0300 - Phone  
(716) 288-5989 - Fax

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

numbers. Behind the counter stood the little French manager, leaning forward and watching him rather coldly. But Crocker was oblivious to all but the one idea; his finger wobbled slowly downward from name to name.

My first impulse was to go directly up to him. But what then? What could I say or do? He was past reason, surely; but not past the use of his physical strength. He had been every bit as drunk as this when he knocked the waiter down in the hotel at Yokohama. What if he were to knock me down in the same way — with that sudden, short swing of his fist to the chin? I would of course drop as the waiter had dropped, and, like him, would lie inert, leaving Crocker free to rove at will.

My eyes turned to the stairway, up and down which I have walked or run so many times during this eventful week.

That was the place. I would at least be above him there . . . if I could pass him and reach it safely.

I stepped forward, cautiously.

The manager was watching me as well, now, with knit brows. But this was no time to consider him.

Crocker was having some difficulty in reading



Standing motionless, he brought out  
his knife



## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

the list of names. His finger went back to the top of the board, and again began wobbling slowly down from line to line.

I tiptoed past him. He did not turn.

I went on up the stairs, but not quite to the top. Thank God, Heloise did not know — not yet.

From this point I could not see him. I waited.

Finally — it seemed a long time, but I suppose it was not more than two or three minutes, really — he appeared at the foot of the stairs. He was swaying a very little. On his face was the crafty expression I had seen there once or twice during our talk in the morning; his eyes had narrowed down to slits. Curiously enough, he was still pale, not red, as I should naturally expect in the case of a man as drunk as he. If he saw me at all, waiting there a little way from the top of the stairway, the sight of me meant nothing to his disordered mind.

He placed one foot on the bottom step, stopped and put his hand to his mouth (standing motionless, as if trying to think), then brought out his knife. He drew it from the sheath. It had a wicked blade — designed for desperate, primitive uses, I should say. The sheath he returned to his pocket.

Then, with a curiously set, almost businesslike

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

expression on his face, he came running up the stairs.

I blocked the way, holding out both arms.

He brushed me aside. But I clung to his arm.

He made an effort to jerk away from me. I said something to him; I don't know now what it was, but I remember that I was very careful not to raise my voice. I think he didn't reply at all; he just kept on pulling away from me.

But I clung. I didn't know what on earth I could do. There could be no agreement, no arrangement, with this wild man. Everything had gone to pieces. All my hopes for Heloise had been snuffed out in a moment. And the thought that my grip on his arm was the only thing intervening between her and a fate that I can not even bring myself to think about, almost stops my heart right now. Then, of course, there was no time to consider even that; I just clung to him.

I think he must have caught hold of the rail at first with his right hand, to steady himself as he silently tugged and jerked; for it was a moment later that he struck me. I had swung around partly behind him, fortunately, and the blow glanced off my head. It made me feel giddy for a moment, but it was not effective. We tottered,

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

and I think he caught again at the rail to keep from falling.

I hung desperately to his thrashing arm, pillow-ing my head behind it to keep out of his reach.

Then, looking down, I saw his feet, the left a step below the right. I hooked my right foot around his left ankle, and, with all my strength, pulled it toward me. I felt his leg give. I pulled harder; made one great convulsive effort.

He tottered, and fell slowly backward, carrying me a little way with him. Then I found myself sitting jammed against the wall, with a dazed, aching head, while he slid clear to the ground floor and lay there, on his back, his left leg doubled under him in a curiously unnatural way. The manager, I remember, stood over him, very white, pulling with rapid little jabs at his mustache, and saying nothing at all.

It was an oddly silent affair, from beginning to end. I remember looking anxiously upward in the fear that Heloise had heard and run out. I dreaded the look of anguish that would surely be on her face. But she was not there.

I drew myself to my feet. A few steps below me lay the knife. I picked it up, then went on down.

Some China boys were bringing a cot. They

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

lifted Crocker, very carefully, and laid him on it, then carried him into the office. He must have been suffering intense pain; but he only set his teeth hard, and once or twice drew in a quick, hissing breath.

I followed them in, and stood over him. After a moment he rolled his head around and looked at me. I could see that he was puzzled.

"Where am I, Eckhart?" he asked.

"At the *Hôtel de Chine*."

"The *Hôtel de* — That's where —"

"It is where I am stopping," said I.

He whitened, and winced; whether in physical or mental pain I am unable to say.

"My leg is broken," he observed, a little later.

I nodded.

"Who did it?"

"I did."

He knit his brows. Then he saw the knife in my hand, and bit his lip. It did not occur to me, then, to put the knife away.

We were silent again. Then — "Take me to the Wagon-lits," he said.

"Oh, no," I cried, "we will take care of you here."

He shook his head, and again bit his lip. "I want to go to the Wagon-lits," he repeated.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

"In one moment, sir." It was the manager, talking over my shoulder. I stared; for I had not heard him approach. "In a moment, sir. The automobile, it will be here."

After all, it was better so, if he could stand it. And doubtless he could.

He was looking again at the knife in my hand. I held it up and stared at it. There was a little blood on it, near the point. He reached out, and I gave it to him. It was his property, not mine. Very deliberately he drew the sheath from his pocket, put the knife into it, and thrust it into his side pocket. But he thought differently of this; for a moment later, when he thought I was not looking, he transferred it to his inside breast pocket. I wondered a little at this. Then it occurred to me that he feared it might be observed by others, there in the side pocket.

An automobile drew up before the building.

"I have telephone for the doctor," said the manager. "It is that he will await us at the Wagon-lits."

Then we carried Crocker out on his cot — the manager, three Chinamen, and I. He was very heavy. And they took him away. He did not look at me again, or speak to me. And I, of course, said nothing.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

I hesitated outside the door of my room, trying to think out what I should say to Heloise. But I could not think very clearly. Neither could I stand there indefinitely.

I went in, opening the door very softly, and closing it softly behind me. My principal thought at the moment, was of getting across to my bureau and brushing my hair and straightening my tie before Heloise should see me. I could not bear to think of coming before her with these visible evidences of the struggle upon me.

But I could not get beyond the bed. I sat down on it, leaning against the footboard. I was sitting this way when Heloise came in.

She came swiftly toward me, a hundred questions in her eyes. She never before looked so lovely to me as standing there before me, blue gown and eye — all blue, it seemed to me — something flushed with excitement, her under lip drawn in a little way between her teeth.

"Oh, Anthony," she said, low and breathless, "you are hurt!"

I shook my head. But she was staring down at my left hand, that lay on my knee. My gaze followed hers. There was blood on my wrist. It must have run down my arm.

She helped me take off my coat, and with a sm



"Oh, Anthony, are you hurt?"



## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

pair of scissors that she got from her room cut off my shirt sleeve at the shoulder. It was wet and stained with red.

There was a gash in my upper arm.

She held up the arm and looked closely at it. I liked the direct, practical way she went about it.

"It is n't an artery," she mused, studying the wound. "Not a big one, anyway." And she washed it, and drew it together with plaster from my emergency kit, and bandaged it very neatly. Then she helped me to lie down — brought pillows from her own room to place behind my head.

She did not ask one question; just worked to make me comfortable. Finally she sat on the edge of the bed, and critically looked me over.

"You 'll be all right," she said thoughtfully. "I know one thing that is the matter. We both forgot all about luncheon."

I had not thought of it.

"Well," she went on, "I feel a little faint myself. I could n't think what on earth was the matter until it came over me all at once that I 've eaten nothing to-day but one very small breakfast."

I let her ring for the waiter and order food. During this space of time I lay still, trying to think how I should tell her. Every moment it grew

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

harder. But at last I caught her hand, when she was passing the bed, and drew her down beside me. She knew well enough what was on my mind but she only stroked my forehead with her soft cool fingers.

In this time, so pregnant for her, and so painful she was thinking how she might spare me!

I told her exactly what had taken place; clumsily enough but, at least, clearly.

She had been there in her room all the time, and had not heard a single unusual sound.

She did not say much, beyond a thoughtful question or two. The tray came, and she arranged the little meal as attractively as she could, there on the edge of the bed. But we both grew more and more sober as the moments went by. The thought of poor Crocker in acute physical pain, that once splendid body of his crippled and useless, disturbed us both. I was glad to see that there were tears in Heloise's eyes.

After the belated luncheon I felt distinctly better. At four o'clock I got up. Heloise, who was doing her best to keep busy about her own room, came to the door and suggested a walk.

"It won't hurt either of us," she added, with a wan smile.

So we went out and strolled over to that great

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

thoroughfare, the Hata High Street, where the yellow people swarm, and the uniformed police direct the traffic with an almost Occidental sense of order, and the long brown camel trains from Mongolia and Kansu pad softly over the very modern pavement and under the electric street lights.

We stayed out until nearly six. But our spirits did not rise as we had hoped. For whatever way our thoughts turned, they found no light. We did not have to talk about this; now and then our eyes met, and that was enough. Heloise was strangely, almost completely passive. Even in such trivial matters as picking our way through the traffic — where, I know, it would be natural for her to look out for herself in that brisk, self-reliant way that young American women have — she would turn to me for guidance, and press against my arm. She watched me a good deal, too, to make sure that I was not becoming tired.

At last we came back to the hotel. As we ascended the stairs I slipped my arm through hers. She looked up at my touch, and tried to smile; and her eyes seemed to cling to mine for a moment. In the dim light I could feel them as well as I could see them.

I opened my door, and stepped aside to let her

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

pass in. Then we both stopped and looked down at a white envelope that lay on the sill. I picked it up, then entered and closed the door while she switched on the light.

I turned the envelope over and over in my hand. She watched me for a fleeting second, almost timidly, then went into her own room to take off her hat.

The envelope bore the imprint of the hotel. I opened it, and read the following:

"It is with regret that the management begs to inform you of a previous engagement of rooms 16 and 18 for the 15th instant, necessitating that the rooms be vacated by that date."

Heloise came to the door, and stood there observing me. She was tucking back a rebellious strand of hair; and she looked very slim and girlish, standing that way with both arms raised.

I went over to the casement window, and threw it open. Then I sat down by it, on one of the chairs of bent iron.

She came toward me, disturbed but hesitant.

I handed her the paper. She read it, standing very still. Then she looked up. Her face twisted a little.

"Why, Anthony," she said, with a catch in her voice, "we're put out of the hotel!"

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

The sentence ended in an odd, explosive little laugh. Then, abruptly, she slipped to the floor beside me, threw her arms across my knees, hid her face on them, and sobbed.

There was nothing I could say, of course. The matter was absurdly unimportant compared with the grimmer uncertainties before us. Yet it had hit me with almost the same force.

I laid my hand on her shoulder. I stroked her head. After a little she groped for my hand with one of hers and, when she found it, clung tightly to it.

And all the time I was thinking how like a child she seemed. I believe that is the supreme quality of the artist — childlikeness. It is a quality that carries the adult worker through hells of suffering and heavens of unearthly joy; and it is a quality for which small allowance is made in this particular world.

It will soon be dawn. I have written almost all night. Probably now I had better try to get some sleep.

She came to the door — hours ago. There was on her face that new passive quality; I can not define it exactly, even in my own thinking.

“Anthony,” she said, with choirs of suppressed

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

music in her low voice, "would it be better, to-morrow you know, for us to . . ." She had to begin again. "Do you wish me to go away from you? You must tell me — not what you want but what you believe is best."

I could only look at her for a moment. I could n't think at all.

"House dear," I said finally, "I don't know what is best. But I know I can't let you go. Not yet. Not with everything uncertain, like this. We 'll look up another hotel in the morning."

She pursed her lips. Then, with a look of sober relief that she could not altogether control she slipped back into her own room. And I closed the shrunken door behind her, and hung my rain-coat over the narrow opening that was left.

*April 15th, 11 A. M.*

WE are in another dingy little hotel — off to the eastward of the Legation Quarter, opposite the German wall. We packed our trunks last night. It is forlorn business, of course. But Heloise has not seemed greatly depressed. I suppose that any activity is a relief to her spirits after the strain.

She is out now; and I am a little worried. The situation has switched about rather oddly, it appears, within the hours, and it is I who must play the passive rôle.

Directly after breakfast we rode over with our hand luggage and engaged these rooms. I left Heloise here, and myself went back for the trunks. It took me some little time.

When I returned, I found a note in my room. Heloise had suspended it by a string from my chandelier, where I could not miss it.

There were only a few sentences, penciled in haste. She feels that she must see Crocker herself. And now that he, poor fellow, has lost the

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

advantage of his greater physical strength, they can meet as equals, in a sense.

This is natural, I think — and right. There would have to be a meeting; I can see that now. But it is not so easy to sit quietly here. I can do nothing, except to go on writing until she . . .

They are calling in the hall. I think they want me at the telephone.

It was Heloise.

I am still to wait. She asks it; and I will. And she is right. It is the only thing to do. This is her task, not mine.

But what a task for her slender hands — alone there in the great hotel where men drink and bargain, where tourists swarm, where women parade!

I wish I could know something of the details, and of what is to be done. If I could only help!

“Anthony,” she said. “He is gone.”

“Gone!” I repeated stupidly.

“He died this morning, Anthony. He was not alive when the automobile arrived here.”

“But,” I blundered on, “I don’t understand — it was a bad fall, but —”

“It was not the fall,” she said. Then, “Wait there, I shall need you.”

I heard the click that cut me off, but for a

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

moment I just stood there with the receiver still pressed to my ear.

It was I myself who had let him have the knife.

they

There

now.  
an do

...  
want

will.  
This

alone  
d bar-  
rade!  
etails,  
help!

as not

and —

' Wait

for a

*April 15th. Night.*

HELOISE called me over to the big hotel this noon, and we had a little talk. I was glad to find her completely mistress of herself. She was very grave, but she had a direct, practical way about her that, I could see, had instantly commanded respect among these strangers. One thought that had worried me not a little during the hours of her absence was that she might have difficulty in identifying herself as Crocker's widow. But it was evident that no such question had arisen.

She told me that there was some uncertainty as to whether the American Minister or the Consul-General at Tientsin should be brought into the matter, and asked me to speak with the manager.

I was down in the main corridor, near the office, waiting for an opportunity to do this, when I encountered the Cincinnati man. He rose from a table in the lounge, and crooked his finger at me. I joined him.

He glanced about to make sure that no one was within earshot, then said, talking around his cigar:

“I saw them bring him in. Is he dead?”

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

I nodded.

"Looked like it. Too bad." He lowered his cigar and pursed his lips.

"Do the job himself?"

I nodded again.

"Thought so. The idiots brought him right through here, with the knife lying on top of the robe. Pure luck that it happened to be morning, and nobody much around. I've been looking him up. It's awkward — awkward as hell. I saw his wife. You want to keep her out of the publicity, I take it."

The man was not unkind. He was studying me with shrewd eyes,— I knew that,— but he was so physically big and solid, and so plainly a man of affairs in that rough, practical world that Crocker himself had inhabited, that I found myself leaning on him. He could help. And, as I returned his quiet gaze, I knew that I could trust him. I realized, all at once, that the code has its good side as well as its bad.

"Has there got to be publicity?" I asked.

He squinted his eyes, took a thoughtful pull at his cigar, and nodded. "Rather," he replied. "Everybody knows the Crocker family. And this fellow himself has been on the front page now and then. Publicity? Good God, man, stop and think

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

a minute! He 's dead. And death is one thing you can't hush up so easily. I know our newspaper boys — and I know *that*. . . . Look here suppose I take hold with you. Glad to do what can."

I nodded at this, and said — "I wish you would."

"All right. But tell me first, is Mrs. Crocker all right? The correspondents are sure to get at her, you know. Can she meet them, and keep cool?"

"Yes," said I, "she can do that."

His gaze lingered a moment on my face.

"I thought so," he replied. "She looks like the right kind."

For a little time he sat back in his chair, smoking and meditating. Then he said:

"I 'll get the Consul-General on the wire and ask him to come over himself. We 'll have to tell him everything, but I think we can satisfy him — I can bear witness that he was drunk and making threats. So can you. The little Frenchman from the other hotel must have seen the thing. He sputtered around like a crazy man."

"Yes," said I, "Crocker was alive when they started over here in the automobile."

"I gathered that. Well, we can give a pretty

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

complete story, among us all. I don't know just how much you can tell, of course, but I advise you to come out with everything you know. Then, when we are all together, we can agree on what we'll give to the press. The managers of both hotels will be glad to keep it quiet. And the Consul-General's all right — he'll help us out to that extent, I think. You see, there's no public interest to consider, nothing to hide but news. It's the lady being involved, you know . . ."

He smoked a moment longer, then concluded:

"I think we can swing it. You go up now and advise the lady to keep very quiet and follow instructions, while I'm getting Tientsin on the wire. Then meet me here"

When I came down, twenty minutes later, he met me with a cheerful sort of steadiness and led the way to a corner of the lounge.

"The old boy's coming himself," he said, as we dropped into chairs. "I'm dam' glad. This is no job for student interpreters."

For a few moments we talked along in a desultory way. We had to wait for a few hours — no escaping that. I could see that the Cincinnati man had assumed the task of keeping me occupied, and I liked him for it.

He gave me his card, by the way. His name is

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

Hindmann. He has large interests in vaudeville theaters through the Middle West.

As we chatted, my share in this strange drama of Crocker's life and death seemed to be clearing itself up in my mind and taking form as a narrative. Hindmann had advised me to tell everything to the Consul-General. I was wondering how I could ever do it. For one moment I even thought of handing him my journal and asking him to read it. The next moment, of course, I realized how impossible it would be to do that — for this most intimately personal of my belongings is no longer mine; it is more than a part Heloise's. And the story I tell the Consul-General must be only my story.

Not an easy thing to do — disentangle my share in the tragic business from Heloise's and my joint share, and tell only that much while still telling the truth! It is a little out of my line, this lawyer-like sort of thinking.

I must have appeared rather distract to Hindmann. But if I did, he ignored it. He just sat and smoked — a comfortably fat, round-faced man with shrewd, steady eyes — and talked along in an easy manner. He told me a good deal about his vaudeville business, I remember, and the curious problems that are constantly arising out of the in-

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

vasion of the entertainment field by the moving pictures. I think I expressed some interest, now and then, even asked an intelligent question or two; but all the time that story was arranging and rearranging itself in the back of my head.

Finally I found myself beginning to tell bits of it to him. After all, why not? He would hear most of it anyway, before night. Then, after a little, it all came rushing out; and I realized that I was making a confidant of this fat man. It had to be, I think. Surely every human being, at certain intense moments of his life, needs a confidant. And I suppose there is never any telling, in a given case, what sort of individual will be chosen for the trust. Crocker chose me—and Sir Robert! I chose Mr. Hindmann, of Cincinnati . . . sitting there in a corner of the lounge of the *Hôtel Wagon-lits*, talking in a low voice in order that the little groups of American and British folk and Germans might not hear the details of the love that has so very nearly torn my life to pieces. The usual row of Chinese merchants were over against the wall, I remember, with their glorious display of embroidered silk coats and skirts and scarves and squares hung higher than their heads. Once a great Mandarin walked by and bowed impersonally to us, attended by a dozen or more of

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

lesser Mandarins who bowed in their turn; and they all wore stiff-fitting frock coats, and American shoes, and silk hats that came down almost to the tops of their ears!

Hindmann said very little — just listened, and smoked. Then, when I had finished, he turned away, looked rather steadily out the window, and muttered something about its being a queer world.

Later on, when it was about time for the Consul-General to arrive, he advised me to tell only of my earlier acquaintance with Crocker, of his drinking and his declared intent to do murder, of my happening to be on the stairway in the *Hôtel de Chine* when he came running up with a knife in his hand — and the rest in full.

“But,” I protested, “the Consul-General will suspect. There are too many coincidences in that story.”

“Of course there are,” said Hindmann. “And of course he ’ll see through them. He was n’t born yesterday. But he won’t say anything about that. Neither will you. And there you are.”

The Consul-General, with his secretary, arrived at four o’clock. He took possession at once of Crocker’s effects, locked them in his room and put a seal on the door. Then he called all of us before him in the manager’s private office — the two hotel

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

men, Hindmann and myself — and in the course of an hour's steady questioning drew out the story.

After which I and the hotel men withdrew, leaving him with Hindmann for another hour. I don't know what was said; Hindmann has not referred to it since. But a messenger was sent to the Legation and I know that the Consul-General himself did some telephoning.

One curious fact came out during the examination in the manager's office. Before the automobile had got out of the little Chinese street on the way from the *Hôtel de Chine*, Crocker borrowed a pencil and wrote a few hasty sentences on the back of an envelope. The Consul-General asked for the paper; but no one had thought to look for it. It proved not to be in Crocker's pockets. The automobile was called; and there, sure enough, it was, on the floor of the tonneau, just where he had dropped it.

He had written — “Don't send me home. Bury me in China.” It was dated, and signed. The Consul-General thought this over and finally suggested a temporary interment at Tientsin, unless Mrs. Crocker should have other plans. He said that the matter of a lot could easily be arranged.

Hindmann told me at dinner that the Consul-General is perplexed over Heloise's standing in the

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

matter. While outwardly he is considerate to a fault, he explained privately to Hindmann that he can not recognize her in any official way. He is going to send Crocker's effects home under seal, for the courts to dispose of as they may decide. He suggests that Heloise employ counsel to look after her interest in his property. There is, of course, no hurry about this; it will be a year, or two, or three, before the estate can be wound up.

Hindmann was right about the newspaper correspondents. It seems that several of the largest American papers have their own men here. The great news agencies are represented, of course. And all these men got at us to-day.

I find this experience perhaps the most disturbing of all. They are very insistent, these reporters. They make me curiously uncomfortable. Underlying all their questions is a morbid eagerness to uncover a sensation, to make their "stories" as thrilling as possible. Several of them, I think firmly believe that Crocker was murdered. They have picked up something of his recent history. They know that he was pursuing Heloise, and that he was drinking. Fortunately, none of them appears to connect me with the story in any intimate way. They are all on the trail of that other man—the man with whom she came to China. I realize

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

to-day the curious fact that I do not so much as know the name of that man. I am glad I don't.

But they will have to accept our version, I believe — the simple fact that Crocker took his own life in a fit of despondency. There are only seven persons alive who know further details, and only four who know the whole story.

Two of the reporters forced their way to Heloise this evening. It was just after eight. I was in the lounge, waitin' for Hindmann. I could n't bear to think of dinner, but was trying to drink some coffee and eat a little toast. The usual evening crow was swarming about me, talking every language under the sun. A China boy brought a chit. It was just a line asking me if I could come upstairs, signed "H."

I went up instantly.

The management had given her the use of a small suite on the second floor. The door to her parlor was ajar, and I heard voices. I knocked, and she called to me to come in.

There were the two reporters, hats in hand. Heloise was standing by the table. She was pale, but very erect and composed. She had put on a black tailored suit. It was this, perhaps, that emphasized the ivory whiteness of her skin, and subdued the blue in her eyes.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

I think she saw on my face indications that I was about to speak indiscreetly. For I was. The sight of the reporters in that room, trying to pin Heloise down to the details of this dreadful story, angered me. But before I could utter a word she took command of the situation.

"Forgive me for calling you in this peremptory way, Mr. Eckhart," she said, "but I cannot talk to these men. You were good enough to offer to help, and, since I am alone here, I am forced to take you at your word." Then she turned to the reporters, adding, "Mr. Eckhart knew my husband. You will please talk with him."

Her voice was steady; but my quick eye caught a familiar, listless gesture of her left hand as she finished.

"But, Mrs. Crocker," persisted the older man, "it has been said that —"

I threw the door wide, and sprang directly in front of Heloise, facing the reporter.

"Get out!" I said.

He frowned, but backed toward the door, as I advanced on him. Thus I got them out into the corridor. I was all ablaze. But at the door I turned for one brief glance at Heloise. Her lips were compressed. She gave me a swift look of warning. This steadied me. I closed the door,



"Get out," I said



## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

and walked down the corridor after the reporters.

"Come downstairs," I said, "and ask your questions of me."

So I myself came nearer to an outbreak than have any of the others. But I shall not lose my head again. And after one or two days, Hindmann tells me, the news value of the episode will have flattened out, and they will let us alone.

*April 16th. Morning.*

WE are going down to Tientsin on the forenoon train for the funeral. Then back here before night.

Heloise herself has seen to all the little necessary arrangements. She had me get what few flowers I could last night. And I believe we can get more in Tientsin. She wants to do everything she can for his memory in these last hours.

I think she is very fine about it. She exhibits no weakness. She shrinks neither from what she regards as her duty in this tragic time nor from the results of her own acts. It has all come back to her, of course, in a thousand memory-shapes. It must have. But she does not speak of that.

The Minister sent over a large bunch of lilac blossoms last night, cut from the bushes in the Legation compound.

ning.

the fore-  
en back

necessary  
flowers  
et more  
she can

exhibits  
what she  
or from  
me back  
-shapes.  
hat.

of lilac  
in the

*April 17th.*

WE came back to Peking on the late afternoon train — Heloise, Hindmann and I. But Hindmann stayed in the smoking car most of the way.

Heloise and I sat in our compartment without saying much of anything. The sober spell of the funeral service was on us both. I bought some magazines at Tientsin, and laid them on the seat close to her hand. She picked one up, and turned the pages, but without much interest. In a few moments she laid it aside. Most of the way she rested her head back in the corner of the seat and watched the little brick stations flit by, and the Chinese farms with their mud-walled compounds.

After a time I went forward and joined Hindmann. I thought Heloise would be glad of a little solitude. Then there was a chance that she might sleep a little. But I don't believe she did, for when I looked in on her, half an hour later, she was sitting forward, chin on hand, studying the flat brown countryside with its occasional squares of green millet-spears.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

She gave me a faint smile.

"Don't go away again," she said, her eyes back on the brown and green fields and the dingy gray compounds.

And since she was not looking at me, and seemed not to expect a reply, I just dropped down opposite her and myself gazed out the window.

After a little she spoke again, with some uncertainty in her voice.

"I'll move my things back to our little hotel — first, Anthony."

I must have shaken my head, for she added, more resolutely —

"I must, Anthony."

"It would be trying for you to stay on at the *Wagon-lits*, of course," I began.

"It is n't only that," said she; then stopped.

It was not only that, of course. The poor child was, is, penniless. But this was something I could not talk about. For the first time in many days there was an awkwardness between us. Certainly I felt it, and I think she did. We could n't quite think out what to say. We had been in the presence of death, and love seemed a petty, selfish thing. And back of this, something had happened that I don't quite understand now. We have no longer the poignantly intimate sense of apartness from

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

the world that we had during those strange, wonderful days at the *Hôtel de Chine*. The world has thrust itself between us. I can see now that we were a million miles away from actual life, over there in our two little rooms with the shrunken door between. We did not know it then; but we were. We have become self-conscious. Many things flitted into my mind to say, but I could not say them. They were all unpleasantly flavored with Consuls-General, and big, noisy hotels, and newspapers, and legal disputes. It was depressing to think that we could no longer slip unnoticed about the quaint, barbaric old city. We are known now; conspicuous, even.

And woven through all these thoughts, deep in our common consciousness, hovered that brooding mystery of death.

"All right, Heloise," said I, "we will get your bags back to-night. The first thing. And we won't hurry about straightening out our plans. Wait a few days, until you feel more like facing things. What you need now, I think, is some rest."

She shook her head. "I don't need rest, Anthony. Goodness knows I have strength enough for six women. I can face things. No, let's plan now. What do you want me to do?"

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

I sat there for several long moments, trying to think how to say it. I remember that I rubbed my forefinger back and forth along the windowsill, through the dust, and followed it intently with my eyes.

Finally she asked, still gazing out the window —

“Do you think I ought to go to Paris, Anthony?”

I nodded. Then, as she was not looking at me, said —“Yes, I do.”

“But how, Anthony? How on earth can I? Everything is mixed now.”

“I know,” said I. “But I’ve been thinking that out. We can do it.”

“Yes,” said she; “but don’t you see —”

It was not becoming easier. So I broke out with my conclusions:

“In its essentials, dear, our plan is not changed at all.”

“That’s absurd, Anthony!”

“No. What has happened has merely deferred the payment of that money. Ultimately it will have to come to you. Something, surely. I will advance it.” She moved restlessly. I hurried on.

“You will give me your note and an assignment of your claim on the estate. I — I will charge you

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

interest, Heloise. It will be perfectly businesslike. These things are done every day. Really."

It was no good talking on. She had turned her face away, and, under pretext of resting it on her hand, was hiding it from me. I forgot what she had said about not leaving her again, and stumbled out of the compartment and went back to Hindmann.

I did not return until he told me that we were approaching the outskirts of Peking.

She smiled, as she had before. Then I helped her on with her coat, and gathered up the magazines. We stood there, awkwardly.

Finally I said—"Well, we aren't quite there yet. We may as well sit again."

Then the train slowed down, and dallied along by jerky stages.

"Anthony," said she, "I've been thinking . . . you never saw him in his younger days. He was a very likeable man, dear. He got on with people. And he was a good business man. Big and bluff, you know, and strong. I—I've been thinking—we should n't have married, he and I. That was a mistake. I was too young to know what marriage means. And he was very positive. But I can't help wishing you had seen him — before. I really think you would have liked him, Anthony. Strong

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

men always did. . . . You don't think it strange of me?"

"Heloise, dear," said I, "I've been thinking the same strange thoughts. I did like him. He never really knew what he was doing. Even after what happened — what he tried to do — I have n't been able to feel any hatred. No, not even anger. Nothing but a queer sort of sorrow."

"Oh, Anthony," she breathed, her eyes shining. "Do you feel that way?"

Then she said — "I've wanted to ask you. . . . It's difficult . . . did he know about — us, Anthony?"

I could n't say much now. But I nodded.

Her eyes were on mine; her lips were parted. "You told him, Anthony?"

I nodded again.

"Oh," she cried softly — with immense relief on her dear face — "oh, Anthony, I'm so glad. Because he never could have felt in that terrible way toward you. He did n't, Anthony, did he?"

I shook my head.

The train rolled into the station-shadows, and stopped.

"Because," she was saying in my ear, as we moved slowly out into the corridor, "hard as he was sometimes, and positive, and all shaken and

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

tortured, even he knew the real things when he found them, Anthony. It would have hurt him, but he would have been fair -- once he could really get it clear . . ." And she whispered, right there in the corridor of the car, with passengers crowding behind us and before -- "I'm so glad he knew it was you!"

Hindmann tells me that we passed Sir Robert to-day in the railway station at Tientsin. It seems that that old man and I actually brushed sleeves.

I didn't know this. Didn't see him at all, in fact. But Hindmann says he looked straight at me, without the slightest sign of recognition — first at Heloise and then at me.

He had a young woman with him; a rather good-looking girlish person, very thin, but "with a way about her." Hindmann has seen her before. He thinks she ran a gambling club in Macao when he was last on the Coast.

Sir Robert himself impressed him as looking extremely old and not a little feeble, with a slight paralysis that has twisted his face up curiously on the left side.

I am glad I did not see him. I hope I never shall.

*Grand Hôtel des Wagon-lits.*  
*April 17th. Later.*

I HELPED Heloise get her things back to our little hotel last night. Then I packed a bag and came over here and took a room.

She didn't say anything when I told her I was going to do this. But I am sure she realizes that it is the only thing to do. It disturbs me to think of her alone over there. But now that she is known to half the white people in Peking, I will not permit myself to stay there with her. I will not have her talked about on any new grounds. And now that I am beginning to understand her, I see clearly enough that I must protect her. Lately it has seemed to me that none of the more artificial restraints that society accepts as necessary details of a working code mean much to her.

I begin to think that in certain fine ways women are more primitive than men. In the sense, I mean, that their deeper emotional nature lies closer to the roots of life than ours does. They are more elementally natural, harder to sophisticate. They feel more swiftly and surely, without the elaborate

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

intellectual machinery that men find it necessary to call into use in order to arrive at conclusions. In certain respects they are deeper and bigger than we are.

I have read all this in the books, of course—years ago—but never before believed it in the sense that belief implies personal experience and understanding.

ter.  
o our  
a bag

I was  
s that  
think  
she is  
I will  
I will  
ounds.  
her, I  
Lately  
rtificial  
details

women  
ense, I  
s closer  
re more  
They  
aborate

*April 18th. Morning.  
(At the Wagon-lits).*

YES, I was right in moving over here. Heloise admitted it to-day. I asked her if she did n't agree with me, and she said she had come to think that my judgment is better than hers in these matters. God knows, I am unworldly enough — sometimes I feel that she and I are nothing but a couple of babes in the woods of life — but at least I am a bit more worldly than she.

And I was right in insisting that we go right on with our plan, as if nothing had happened. I have forced myself to go over the whole difficult business, thinking it out step by step; and I was right.

It is a difficult business. Sometimes, at night, when my imagination slips out of control and dream-pictures come of a home of my own, it is almost more than I can bear. Last night I had to switch on the lights and work until daylight over the notes for Volume Six. (That is to be the section devoted to "True Intervals and Natural Song.")

I am driving myself to think constantly of the

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

other side of the picture — to realize how beautiful Heloise is, what a person she is and what a voice she has. No home that I could conceivably offer her would be large enough to contain her life. And when I construct in my mind the years during which she would have to fight her own inclinations, deliberately confine her activities and build barriers against the growth of her own soul, my resolution strengthens. If it is hard to give her up now, it would be impossible then. I know myself well enough to know what I should be and do, then. I would be jealous of her very bigness. I would, likely as not, come to hate her beauty, her voice, her capacity for work. I would fight to make a *Hausfrau* of her, with babies, and meals to get — meals for me! — and sweeping and dusting to look after. And then, should I succeed in that miserable purpose; should I have to realize, every day and every night, with her beauty fading and with that wonderful edge on her voice becoming blunted and the tones growing uneven and foggy, that I had shut her out of the chance for growth that God gave her — this, after she had already taken one desperate, tragic step toward freedom — should I find myself forced to live, day after day, year after year, with any such realization as that, I think the time would come when I would want to kill myself.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

The man who deliberately stops a woman's growth — no matter what his traditions and beliefs; no matter what his fears for her — is doing a monstrous thing, a thing for which he must some day answer to the God of all life.

As civilization stands now, the woman who marries shuts herself out from the possibility of a career. Not in every instance, of course; but certainly in such an average, modest marriage as mine would have to be. I have some means, of course; but not nearly enough. And it is not likely that I shall ever "make" money in any large way.

No, I really don't believe the thing can be done. Not yet. I like to hope that some day the world will become more nearly civilized as regards marriage. But first we must make it less a matter of land and houses and goods, and of woman as property along with these. And I think we shall probably come to some system of paying woman directly for the great service of child-bearing and rearing. Yes, we men must give up the last shreds of our thought of woman as a personal possession. We are farther from that, still, than we realize, I think. I myself am far, far from it. Where Heloise is concerned, I know perfectly well that I am not to be trusted. God only knows what I would do, what I would come to think and believe. For

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

the magic that is always between us would be confused in a thousand subtle ways with the heritage of deep-lying racial habits that are in me as in every other man.

But at least, I have come to see it. For this I am thankful.

*Late Afternoon.  
(still the 18th.)*

**H**ELOISE understands now. And she agrees that I am right. She will accept the loan I suggested. And she will go to Paris.

She called up this afternoon — while I was writing.

"Anthony," she said, "take me for a walk. It's stuffy here. I want some air."

So she started out, and I met her near the eastern end of Legation Street.

"Just a little walk, Anthony," she said. "I'm not getting any exercise these days. I don't seem to want to go out alone any more. . . . Up on the wall, Anthony, where we can feel the wind. And there won't be so much dust."

So we climbed the ramp, and walked from the Hatamen to the Chienmen and back — two miles. South of us extended the Chinese city, that lies outside the historic stronghold of the Manchus. Northward, as far as we could see, stretched the Tartar capital, now all fresh green foliage with

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

bits of curving tile roofs peeping out in gray-brown patches. For Peking is a city of trees.

We could see the brick walls of the Imperial City, and, within that, of the Forbidden City itself; with its acres of glazed yellow roofs.

The Tartar wall is all o' fifty feet high, and nearly as broad on the top. Grass grows there; and there are parapets, and the casual ruins of stone barricades where men have fought.

I told Heloise, while we walked, that I had worked it all out. I told her, too, of a curious coincidence of this very morning. I picked up a magazine in the hotel lounge, and, turning the pages, found my attention arrested by an interview with some great singers. In that paper the three finest living operatic sopranos agreed that marriage, home, domesticity, could play no part in their lives.

I felt it my duty to tell her about this. We simply have got to face these facts. And I must help keep up her courage with my own. Once she finds herself established at Paris, her work going on, the stimulus of new acquaintances and of fine music and of the stir and rush of the Western World all about her, it will not be so hard, I think. At present, the loneliness, the sense of distance from her own kind, and the perplexing reactions

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

of the tragedy that we have both had to pass through, combine to bring her deep emotional self closer to the surface than normal.

Then, of course, she is quite dependent on me. We do not speak of this; but I know well enough that it is every moment in her thoughts.

We did not stay out long. It is most difficult when we are together. I am going to start my

work at once. It is the only way to keep steady—I can see that. I have letters to the American Minister. I shall present them to-morrow.

We lingered at the door of her hotel. Neither of us wanted to say good-by. We stood there for several moments without speaking. Then she said:

“Will you come in?”

I shook my head.

She took a few slow steps into the doorway; then stopped.

“I shall not change, Anthony—in Paris!” she said, and hurried in without looking back.

I have succeeded in getting reservations for her on the Trans-Siberian, leaving Harbin on the 23rd. That means starting from Peking on the 21st—in three days.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

She says that she will not mind the long journey alone. I wish I knew of some American or English family that is going through to Moscow on that train. But I feel pretty sure that she will make the acquaintance of some fairly congenial group of tourists.

Sometimes I think of troubles that may come to her in case she should meet with no such good fortune; and then my head becomes hot and I have to clench my hands and walk out in the air. There will be men of course — and ten long days of that train! Certain ugly phrases of Sir Robert's float to the surface of my thoughts and stay there to irritate me. I can't help dwelling a little on the sinister code of the white men who travel in the East.

But it is no good thinking of these things. Heloise says are only the chances of life, and that we have to take those. "And Anthony," she added to-day, "they can annoy me, but they can't hurt me — they can't make any difference."

April 19th. Noon.

I SENT one of my letters of introduction to the American Minister to-day, by coolie.

He replied at once, with a cordial chit asking me to tea this afternoon.

I find that Hindmann knows him, and has spoken of me to him. It turns out that the Minister regards himself as something of an amateur in Chinese music. He knew my name.

"He showed me a big book," said Hindmann, in telling me about it, last night. "Had a lot of queer music scales in it, and pictures of instruments. He said it was the standard authority on the subject."

"What book?" I asked him.

"Don't remember the title," said he.

"But think, man! Think! Who wrote it?"

"Did n't notice that, either. Some German, though."

"That can not be," said I, with some excitement, I will admit. "Neither Boag nor von Stumbostel is within five years of publishing the results of his researches. I am nearer it than they

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

My first volume, 'The Origins of Musical Sound,' stands now in galley proof and will be published within two years. No, no, no! There is no German work that is the authority on primitive music. There is, as yet, no authoritative work. Van Haalst, Elton, Père Avard, and twenty others, merely pointed the way. All of them pointed the way wrong in certain important respects. No, if there is an authority, it is myself. I am the standard authority. The Minister does not know what he is talking about."

Hindmann grinned.

"Seems to me," he observed, "it was published at Bonn."

"At Bonn!" I shouted at him—"At Bonn!"

"Yes—I'm sure it was Bonn."

"It was not the book of von Westfall?"

"That's it," said he, nodding. "That's the guy—von Westfall."

So the influence of that scoundrel has penetrated to Peking! He has actually got himself regarded as an "authority"! I didn't know what to say or think. But Hindmann calmed me down a good deal. He has a steady influence on me, anyway.

"You need n't sputter at me," he said. "I didn't write it."

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

"I know," said I. "But I was not thinking of you. I do not know what to do. I was to have had tea with the Minister to-day."

"Well," remarked Hindmann, around his cigar, "why not?"

"Why not?" I repeated. "It is impossible. This man will wish to talk my subject — my subject! — with the work of that charlatan at his elbow. No, I will not talk with him. I can not. Don't you see?"

"No," said Hindmann, "not exactly."

"I am at once placed in competition with one that I know to be an absolute impostor. The Minister will take seriously what he regards as his own views. But they will not be his own — they will be the views of von Westfall. Don't you see? I can't go!"

Hindmann sat for a little while, smoking and thinking. He has a very comfortable way of settling his plump person into a big arm-chair.

"Look here," he said. "You want to go over there. It's worth doing."

I'm afraid I sniffed at this.

"But it is," he went on. "So what you want to do is to go right ahead with it. Don't be licked by a book."

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

He did n't quite understand me there. I was not "licked" at all, and I told him so.

"Prove it by going, then," he said.

"But I 'm afraid I shall insult him. I shall have to say what I believe."

"Go ahead and insult him, then," said he; and he took out his cigar and grinned cheerfully.

*Same date.*

I GOT Hindmann to help me out with the notes and the assignment of her interest in the estate.

He knows all about these things. He got blank note forms from the manager of the hotel. And he himself dictated the assignment paper to a Japanese stenographer. It was astonishing to me to hear him do this; on matters of legal phraseology, and where precise statement of fact is required, he is very clear-headed. But then, I suppose that my peculiar faculties would be equally surprising and interesting to him.

The document worried me a good deal. It is quite long; and it makes over to me, in the most unequivocal language, Heloise's entire interest in the property. It is worded harshly and sharply. Just reading it, I had the unpleasant feeling that I was forcing her to sign away to me everything she may possess in the world as security for a paltry loan.

"What's the matter with it?" asked Hindmann, watching my face.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

"It has such a horribly ironclad look," said I.

"Then why make her sign it?"

"Because she'd never in the world accept the money, any other way."

"Oh," said he, very thoughtful.

"Look here," I suggested, "could n't you modify it a little? Make it not quite so strong?"

He shook his head. "It's the regular legal form, Eckhart. I've had to do this sort of thing half a dozen times." He smoked a little. "I suppose you know it is n't worth a hang."

"Not worth anything?"

"Poorest security in the world. It won't be even partly binding until the executor of the estate has pledged himself to you to execute the agreement, and to accept personal responsibility in the matter. Full of holes, that thing is."

I did n't dare let him know how my heart jumped at this. I am glad it is n't binding. I only wish it did n't look so ugly. I can't bear to think of watching her face when she reads it. I fear it will depress her. And she will have to struggle to conceal her depression.

I have figured it out that I can spare a thousand dollars from my letter of credit now. So that all she will have to do is to sign that document and one note for a thousand dollars. Then when I

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

send her the next draft I need only enclose a new note for her signature. At Hindmann's suggestion I am going to draw each note to run a relatively short time—a year, say. Then I can look after the renewing of them myself, from time to time.

The thousand dollars that I let her have now will of course have to come out of my research money, which is really not mine at all. But at the same time that I write Harbury, of the Foundation, to sell my real estate bonds and the two railway bonds that are at the Trust Company, I shall ask him to notify the Committee that I have diverted this amount for personal use and request him to hold back an equal amount from this money of my own that he will be sending me, against the draft on my letter of credit. Hindmann has drawn up just the paper for me to send Harbury, giving him complete power to dispose of the properties for me. Really, I don't know what I should have done in all these financial complications without that fat man.

One thing I am very glad of. It is n't going to pinch me at all to do this for Heloise. My salary will go right on, of course; and the research fund will be there as before. I shan't even have to skimp on hotels and small purchases. To tell

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

the truth, I was worried, a little, when I made that offer to her the other day. I didn't realize, at the moment, how much money I have, and how easy it is to get at. This way, I can look right into her eyes and tell her that I shall not be the less comfortable for one single hour; and I can tell her with such conviction that she will know it for the truth. It won't be nearly so hard for her.

*'Same date.*

I CAN'T take those papers over. I just can't.  
I'm going to send them by messenger.

I'm sending the money too — in gold — in a bag. A thousand dollars. The messenger will have instructions to remain with her, and carry the money to the Hongkong bank for her, in order that she may convert the greater part of it into traveler's checks or a letter of credit. It will be best for me not to appear in this transaction, of course.

I am sending it to-day because surely she will have little purchases to make, and I know how irritating it is to a person of spirit to be dependent on another for small sums of money.

I did not foresee how deeply it would stir me to do this little thing. It has roused unfamiliar, haunting thoughts and feelings and day dreams. I have been thinking of children, and of the wonderful pleasure of doing for them and making them happy. . . .

This will not do.

I am going over to the Legation now for tea.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

I got out my black cutaway coat and had it pressed.  
And the China boy has smoothed down my silk  
hat, after a fashion. I shall carry the gold-headed  
cane that was given me by my seminar students  
six years ago, lacking two months. It was a curi-  
ous thing for them to do. But pleasing.

Hindmann had the right idea, as usual.

I will not be licked by a book.

And I shall say exactly what I know to be true.  
Not in a quarrelsome spirit, of course; but straight  
out. It is nothing to me that he is the American  
Minister.

*Still the 19th. Very late.*

I HAVE been greatly surprised.

When I was shown into the drawing-room at the Legation residence, the Minister himself greeted me. He is a not unattractive man — past middle life, rather stout, with many of the familiar mannerisms of the prosperous man of business who has reached a point in life where he feels he can afford to indulge and, perhaps, educate the gentler side of his nature.

I suppose his present position is a reward for generous contributions to the expenses of his party. Though I should personally regard it as a punishment.

He and his lady (a person of some real charm) have surrounded themselves with attractive objects of Oriental art. The large rug in the drawing-room is as fine an example of Chinese blue and white weaving as I remember having seen. I had an opportunity — when the Minister stepped out of the room for a moment, and before the ladies came in — of turning back a corner and counting the threads. They ran twenty and twenty-one to

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

the inch, using my thumb-joint as a rough measurement; which is pretty close weaving, especially when you consider that the rug is at least sixteen feet by twenty-four in size.

The chairs and tables were all of carved black-wood and teak stained black, very elaborate, and pleasing in an ornate way. One nest of tables, in the corner, was far and away the finest example of Chinese carving I have seen, barring small objects of ivory and such, where the work is all on a minute scale and therefore more delicate in design and workmanship. There were two exquisitely carved wooden screens, and a great number of small vases, each on its wooden stand. The most beautiful objects in the room were two immense blue and white vases, standing all of seven to eight feet high on their pedestals. The Minister says they are of the Ming period. And while he did not exactly speak of them in terms of money value, as we Americans are prone to do, he did refer casually to another pair, similar to these except that the glaze was distinctly inferior, that sold in New York for sixteen thousand dollars.

I mean to give more time to the study of Chinese porcelains later on, when settled down in my work, as well as to the history of their painting and draw-

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

ing. The early musical forms of a people are so inextricably linked with all their other folk-habits that one must understand something of all of them in order to arrive at a really thorough knowledge of any one. Otherwise one would be a mere narrow-rut scientist, like an oculist who gives no thought to the general health of a patient or the stomach specialist who has no regard for the condition of the teeth.

I fear I was a little stiff at first, even severe, when tea was served. The talk was general. But I could not forget that somewhere on that man's shelves stood von Westfall's work. Of course though, the Minister is the merest dilettante. I saw that right away. The sort of man who uses his money to build up an atmosphere of understanding and refinement about himself, without being altogether successful at it.

Some other outsiders had come in, ladies from the hotel, and officers of the Legation Guard; and when these rose to go, and of course I with them, the Minister asked me to stay. He led me to his office, seated me comfortably, and gave me a cigar — the best cigar, in fact, I have smoked since landing at Yokohama. Out here, it is impossible to get much besides the rather rank Manila article that comes wrapped in tinfoil. This was a real

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

Havana, however, carefully preserved in a humidor. Then he said:

"I have known for some time of the work your Foundation is doing in the study of primitive music, Dr. Eckhart. And it is, I may say, a subject that greatly interests me."

I would not speak what was in my mind. Not yet — for he had not yet thrown that book at my head. It was not yet the time to insult him. It would be distinctly unreasonable to insult him at this stage. So I inclined my head, and waited.

"I have read some of the older works on the subject of Chinese music — Van Haalst, Elton, Avard, Pegrew, and so on — and have looked forward rather eagerly to the more complete results of modern research. A book was recommended to me when I was home last year — a book by von Westfall, of Bonn."

I smoked hard and fast. He went on:

"It was recommended as an authoritative work. But I find it, in certain respects, quite unsatisfactory."

I sat right up in my chair and stared at him. He continued, rather apologetically —

"Of course, I am an utter amateur in these matters, Dr. Eckhart. But it is disturbing to me to find this supposed authority referring to the twelve

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

*lüs* as giving the twelve equal semitones of the octave. Why, that is Van Haalst's old error. I know better than that myself. I have sounded the *lüs* in the Confucian temple, and they give out very uneven intervals, ranging over an octave and a half, at least."

I jumped to my feet and waved my cigar at him. And my voice rang out shrilly. I could n't help this; my surprise was so sudden and so complete.

"An octave and three quarters, very nearly," I cried. "From about our *a* to the *f* of the second octave above." And I added, "von Westfall is a faker—a cheap scoundrel masquerading in the robes of the scholar—a man who rushes his guesses into print before the honestly prepared work can be completed. He is not an authority. He never was. It is I who am the authority. I, and perhaps von Stumbostel, of Berlin. Ask Boag! Ask Ramel, Fourmont, de Musseau! Ask Sir Frederick Rhodes, of Cambridge!" And I laughed.

The Minister was impressed. I will say that for him. He got up too, and seized my hand.

"I am delighted," he said. "You confirm my own rough conclusions. Come with me. I have something here that will interest you.' At least,

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

I should be glad to have your opinion of it."

He led the way into a small room across the hall, unlocking the door with a key from his pocket. I followed him in. He raised the window shades, then turned with a gesture.

There, against the wall, stood an object the precise like of which I had never expected to see outside of the Imperial palace and possibly a temple or two at Peking or Nanking.

It was one of the old stone chimes. The very first glance assured me that it was authentic. The stones were all of the same size, shaped roughly like the letter L. They hung in a double row, in a carved frame of wood, each separate stone suspended by a metal ring — gold, I think — that pierced the stone at the angle. They were all the same size, of course, for the difference of pitch is accounted for by the varying thickness of the stones. I counted them; there were sixteen — the notes of the twelve *lüs*, and the first four notes of the grave series.

And each of these large stones was a perfect piece of green, translucent jade!

"The Pien Ch'ing!" I cried.

He bowed.

I stepped forward and examined the stones. They were very old; hard as jade is, the corners

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

and edges were worn down here and there. I tapped them softly. I simply could not believe my eyes.

The Minister handed me the little wooden mallet that lay at the base. This too was very old, though of course a thing of this week as compared with the stones. My mind was racing back into dim periods of Chinese history. It would be interesting to know where those jade stones have been — in what old royal palaces of Peking, Nanking, Hangchau, Sian-fu — through what wars they have lain buried or have passed from one conquering hand to another — in what stately caravans they may have been transported across a swarming, prostrate land. From their appearance they must have been in existence long before the destructive hand of the old Emperor Che Huang-ti was raised against every book and every instrument of art or music in the land.

I struck the stones, slowly, one after the other. But first I said —

“The intervals will not be perfect.”

“No,” said he, “for the stones are worn.”

I struck that old sixteen-note scale again and again. I tested the close intervals of the middle section. I listened with my delicate aural nerves strained to the uttermost.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

We talked excitedly. I fear it was I who said the most. But that was natural enough. For I know my subject, and he does not. I told him the legend that thousands of years ago a perfect stone chime was found in a pool, and that it has since been used to give the correct pitch to all Chinese instruments. The known history of the twelve *liüs* gives the lie to this, of course; but the legend is quaint. I think I must have given him also a rough history of the *liüs*, and of their semi-mythical origin in the life of the prehistoric king who measured off a length of bamboo tube with millet grains and produced a tone by sucking air through it, and then got his complete scale by cutting other tubes of half the size, a quarter the size, and so on. I remember giving him a minute explanation of the relation of our piano octave and of the Chinese octave to the fixed acoustic laws; and I told him why the Chinese octave is flat. . . . It got dark while we stood there.

Finally we returned to his study.

He got this Pien Ch'ing, it appears, from a Mandarin shortly after the revolution of 1912. He did not give me the details, and of course I did not press him; though it would mean a good deal to me to know from what palace they were taken, and as much as could be discovered of their

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

history. And, for a wonder, he gave me no idea at all of their cost to him. Quite apart from their historical value, the jade alone—sixteen very large pieces, of an even green color without a streak or flaw that my eye could detect—is worth a fortune in any market from Peking to London.

It must have been his dinner-time.

He said :

“ I am exceedingly glad, Dr. Eckhart, that you approve of my purchase. I had to use my own judgment, you see. Now let me ask you—Is not your Foundation establishing a museum of ancient musical instruments? ”

“ Decidedly we are! ” I cried.

My pulse was racing like mad; and I know my forehead was sweating, for every few minutes, it seems to me, I was wiping my spectacles. Indeed, my handkerchief became quite useless for the purpose, and I had to borrow his.

All the possibilities of this most unexpected situation were dancing in my mind at once. What if he should give this treasure to the Foundation . . . a perfect specimen of the basic musical scale of the Eastern World! I could not be insensible to the fact that some credit would attach to me, should he make the benefaction through me. For this sort of activity is precisely the sort that finan-

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

cial directors are peculiarly fitted to understand. Scholarship and research worry them a little; they are eager for what they call "results." And if any man in the entire field of musical research has ever produced so tangible and valuable a "result" as this ancient and perfect Pien Ch'ing, I have yet to learn of it.

And I was thinking of flattering ways in which his name could be identified with the gift. For we men of science may be what is called "impractical," but we early learn the proper methods of managing our benefactors.

He went on, studying me with his eyes:

"You think, Dr. Eckhart, that the Foundation would regard these stones as an acceptable gift?"

"So acceptable," said I, "that I should consider it one of the great opportunities of my life to act as their representative in the transaction."

"Suppose then," he concluded, "you write me a letter embodying a request for the gift, and suggesting the best method of arranging the matter."

I meant to return to the hotel. But it proved quite impossible. I was altogether too excited for that. Instead, I hailed a rickshaw and drove straight for the little hotel near the German *glacis*.

I rushed up to Heloise's room, and knocked.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

She was within, eating a solitary dinner off a tray.

I told her of my find. I did n't feel like sitting down, but walked about the room as I talked. I described the stones to her. I imitated, as nearly as I could with my strident voice, the sound of the stones — singing the scale for her, "Poom! — poom! — poom! — poom-m-m!"

Heloise sipped her coffee, and followed me with her eyes. She did n't smile very much. To be quite candid, I don't believe she is much interested in Pien Ch'ings. Though I realize now that I did break in on her abruptly, all full of my triumph, without a thought as to what her mood might be.

Come to think of it, I did n't even ask her if she got her traveler's checks all right.

I went away rather crestfallen. She suggested that I sit, but I did n't. I could n't adjust myself, for some reason. All my life I have dreamed of seeing even an incomplete Pien Ch'ing. It was one of my goals in this journey. And I don't believe I am altogether to be blamed if the sight of a perfect one, the opportunity to tap it with these very hands — coupled with the thought that I am to be the means of bringing it to America and placing it within the walls of the institution to which I am devoting these best years of my life —

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

I am not to be blamed if this experience has stirred me into some excitement. It does n't mean that I have forgotten any of the other things.

Why, von Stumbostel himself may have to come to New York to see it!

But to-night I am upset. God knows I don't want to disturb Heloise! God knows I don't want to give her a moment's extra unhappiness! I would gladly bear all her sorrows, if I could.

Hindmann is helping me draft the letter.

When I told him about it, he just sat back in his chair and grinned, and grinned, and grinned.

I think he knew about the Pien Ch'ing, all the time.

*April 20th.*

**H**ER train leaves to-morrow morning.

This morning, before my breakfast, I went into the booth to call her up, and found that she was at the telephone trying to get me.

She said:

"I was n't very nice about your work, yesterday, Anthony. But I didn't quite understand at the moment. And you rushed off before I could think."

I protested. I told her how I have been blaming myself for that.

"But you are wrong, dear," she said. "I'm proud and happy for you. I shall be expecting a great deal of you, Anthony, when I am away off there in Paris."

"I shall expect more of you," I replied doggedly. Then I broke out—"I want to see you."

"I know," she breathed.

"But we must n't, Heloise. It's only one day more. Fortunately, we shall both be busy."

She did n't reply at once. I thought the central operator had cut us off. I called, "Hello,"

## 'ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

two or three times, and was about to ring for central when her voice floated again to my ear —

“Yes, Anthony, I’m here. It is fortunate, of course. . . . You’ll come — at least — in the morning to help me get away?”

“Yes,” said I, “I’ll come in the morning.”

That was all. We said good-by then.

I have sent over a Japanese maid to help with her packing.

For myself, I have followed up the business of the stones all day. I feel that I should like to settle this affair before she goes. I want her to know that my work is starting so wonderfully well. And doubtless I shall hear from the Minister in the morning, the first thing. He has no reason to delay. The suggestion came from him, not from me.

I am proposing to call the Pien Ch’ing by his name. There are a few other perfect or nearly perfect specimens in existence, and a special name is desirable. His will do as well as any for the purpose of identifying ours.

I am very nervous to-night. Hindmann observed it before I was fully aware of it myself. He tried to make me drink some whisky. But I don’t see what good that would do.

These last few days, as I look back on them,

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

seem quite unreal. I walk about. I eat. I even sleep. I talk with Hindmann about one thing and another, naturally enough. I laugh, I become heated, angry. I even think intently of many workaday things. Why, to-day after tiffin, when Hindmann made his curious proposal that Heloise and I go into vaudeville under his management, I discussed the thing quite rationally before declining — particularly as to the possibility of making her gift of close-interval singing intelligible to the ordinary audience. . . . And yet, nothing is really so. Back of it all there is a nervous pressure, a tension. . . .

Well, it is all over, this strange drama. It has changed me vitally. I shall never again be the self-centered — no, not self-centered, either — *work*-centered recluse that I have been. Life has seized upon me and whirled me into its main current. I have felt passion and jealousy. I have loved. I have hated. I have fought. I have held in my arms — close, close — the one woman whose eyes have the magic power to unlock my heart and flood it with the radiant music of love.

And now we go our ways — because it is life. I had her large trunk conveyed to the station this afternoon. To-morrow morning I shall call for her. We shall step into our separate rickshaws;

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

quiet-seeming folk; I a thin man in spectacles and an overcoat and a soft hat; she a slim, graceful woman, wearing a simple black suit, slightly pale for want of the outdoor air, and with a touch of perplexity and mystery in her shadowy blue eyes.

We shall ride to the East Station. I will see that she is comfortably settled on the train; and wish her a not too unpleasant journey, and stand there in the station until the train shall have disappeared beyond the end of the Chinese city wall.

That will be the end.

*April 21st. Early.*

THE letter is here from the Minister. He gives us the Pien Ch'ing outright. It is to bear his name, and to be kept where it will be always accessible to scholars and to the public. He very courteously suggests that the stones be packed under my personal supervision.

I am going down to breakfast now. Then I shall cable Harbury, advising him of the benefaction. Then for Heloise, and the train. . . .

*Same date. Night.*

I CALLED for Heloise at a quarter past nine this morning, and sent up my card.

It was returned to me in a few minutes. Heloise had written on it—"Come up."

Her door was ajar. I stepped in. Her steamer trunk and hand bags were piled there, ready to go.

"Be ready in a moment, Anthony," she said. Then, "You were coming up, were n't you?"

She was busy doing a last bit of sewing on her coat, and spoke without looking up.

"No," said I, "I was n't."

She worked on in silence for a moment. Then she said—"Do we have to go right on, up to the last minute, Anthony, being so dreadfully casual?"

I hardly knew how to answer this. It had seemed to me that we had to do precisely that. I dropped into a chair by the bare center table, and held my hat in my two hands.

"Oh, don't worry, Anthony," she went on. I had never heard her speak in just that tone. It disturbed me. "Don't worry. I'm going. To Harbin—and Moscow—and Paris. In less

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

than an hour I shall be gone. But it did seem to me that we could say good-by up here."

She went right on sewing until the little task was done. Then she bent over and bit off the thread with a jerk of her head. She put the needle in her shopping bag; then pursed her lips and studied the little gold watch on her wrist.

Finally she looked up, and our eyes met.

"Anthony," she said, very quietly, "what if I should n't go?"

I got up and walked back and forth between the table and the door.

"Oh, Heloise," I broke out, "why do you say this now?"

"Why not?" said she.

"Can't you see that our judgment is worth nothing now — nothing at all. We've made our plans."

"Do you want me to go?" she persisted, her eyes half hidden behind drooping lashes, but on me every instant.

"Do I want you to go?" I almost mimicked her. My voice was rising, and she got up and slipped swiftly past me, closing the door and leaning back against it, still watching me. "Do I want to give up the most wonderful thing in my life, and turn back, all alone to my work?" I



“Do we have to go right on, up to the last minute,  
Anthony, being so dreadfully casual?”



## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

choked. "You know better than to ask such a question. It is foolish. You must not say such things to me. I can not bear it."

"Then," said she, "why on earth are we doing it?"

She came to the chair on the other side of the table and sank into it, still watching me.

"You are afraid of happiness," she said.

"No, no—I am not! It is not that!"

"But Anthony, I can't believe that you are afraid of unhappiness. I know you too well."

"I am not. I am choosing unhappiness."

She knit her brows. "Probably," she said slowly and thoughtfully, "it is something of both."

"No," I answered, "you are wrong. You know well enough what it is. It is your freedom. That is the one thing I will not, can not take."

"My what?" she queried, with a curious, faint smile.

"Your freedom!" I cried, standing over her, with clenched hands.

"But Anthony, I am not free. There never was a woman less free—than I am—now—this minute!"

"That is absurd, Heloise."

"It is not absurd. Oh, Anthony, Anthony, will you ever come down out of the clouds! Do you

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

really suppose that I will be free just because you say so — off there in Paris, knowing every moment of the day and night that nothing on earth but your generosity keeps me alive — that every step of my growth will be due to you — that —"

"Stop, dear! You must not —"

"— that I am not even paying my way? Oh, Anthony, bless your dear heart, sometimes, in thinking about you, I laugh — and sometimes I cry. Can't you see that I shall not move a mile toward Paris of my own desire, that I go only because you tell me to — yes, because you order me to? Can't you see that this has been your idea all along, not mine — that you have made every decision, down to the minutest detail of my poor life. . . . Freedom? Why, Anthony dear, I'm a million miles from freedom and traveling the other way! I don't want that kind of freedom. I want to work with you — right by your side. I want to earn some real freedom, the right kind. I want to — yes, to make good with you, Anthony. . . . Oh, I've tried to be good. I've tried to accept your judgment in everything. My life is yours anyway, so there was no harm in that. I love you as I never knew a woman could love a man. I worship you. . . . You must not stop me, Anthony! — Even so, I would give you up.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

If it was best for you. That is all I have asked myself — What would be best for you? And then you've ordered me about so, Anthony, and what on earth *could* I say. I had to plan as you told me to plan. I ought not to be saying this now. I ought to be going away, very quietly, saying — 'Yes, Anthony. I will go, Anthony.' But now you tell me that in your heart you want me to stay. And I can see that it is true. I know you want me. . . . And yet, Anthony, you have the hardihood, you assume the wisdom, to decide for us both — squarely against the dictates of *both* our hearts. You assume not only to decide for us now — you are deciding what the future would be if we should stay together. And that is — why, that is silly, Anthony. There never was a man and woman who needed each other more than you and I need each other." Her voice dropped, and softened. "I don't think a man and woman ever loved more wonderfully, Anthony. We are n't children. We have suffered. And I think we know. . . . You see, dear, I have come to distrust your judgment about some very human things. Every marriage is a risk. People seldom marry who know each other as you and I do, who have tested each other. . . . Oh, I've tried so hard to accept your judgment. I kept waking up

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

last night, and it all raced through and through my head; and still I felt I must do as you say. . . ."

My world was falling about me.

"But your work, child," I cried. "All that stands just as it stood before, when we — well, when I — made the plans. The problem is still there. We can't escape that, not even by the easy process of following our hearts."

She had dropped her eyes. She was smiling.

"There is n't any problem, Anthony," she said.

"Oh, come, Heloise —"

"There is n't, dear. If I spend these next two years just in learning by heart the operas that I've got to know, they will be years very well invested. I could do that out here as well as in Paris."

"But you are begging the question, dear. It is n't just that. You know it is n't just that."

"What is just that?" she asked, still smiling.

It was hard to answer this directly. But I had to. I dropped on my knees beside her. I gripped her shoulders. I tried to make her look at me. For it would not do for us to go all to pieces — we must face this thing.

"Heloise, dear — you are making me say it, but you know the problem is there. You have

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

not forgotten what those three great singers said?"

"No," she murmured, "I remember well enough." But still she would not look up.

"You know what they said . . . the art of the opera singer is the most exacting thing in the world. There is no place in it for a husband, a home . . . and children, dear. For these things are exacting, too. It was the three greatest sopranos in the world who said that."

"Oh, I know all that, Anthony,"—I could not make her lift her eyes,—"but people are so different. There is n't any problem, really. There are only different persons. That's all, Anthony. I could tell you of three other great singers that have husbands, homes and splendid families. . . . Only one thing bothers me—they all happen to be contraltos. Do you suppose there is any such difference as that between contraltos and sopranos, Anthony?"

Now she looked up. That smile was still hovering about her eyes and the corners of her mouth. But when I drew her dear head against my shoulder and pressed my lips to her forehead, it faded.

I kissed her eyes, slowly, one after the other.

Then her hand slid hesitatingly upon my shoulder, as it had once before. Her head nestled back

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

in the hollow of my arm. I bent close. Our lips met.

We said many things. It hardly matters now what they were.

Excepting this. She held my face in her two hands and looked into my eyes.

"Dear, dear boy," she said, "you have lived all your life with theories. Don't you think it is time you lived with a fact. For I'm afraid that's what I am—a fact. And facts are stubborn things, Anthony."

But then she worried a little. "You must n't let me sweep you off your feet, Anthony. We must sit up and think. We must decide this thing."

So she sat up straight. And I leaned back, still kneeling beside her.

For a little space we were very sober. Then she said —

"Anthony! what are you smiling at? What makes you look like that?"

It was a moment before I could compose my features. She had folded her hands in her lap. Her eyes followed mine to the watch on her wrist as I said —

"Your train left the East Station sixteen minutes ago."

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

She drew her under lip in a little way between her teeth, as I had seen her do so many times when she was startled. Then,

"Oh, Anthony!" she said, laughing a little—"the big trunk has gone with it."

We shall get the trunk back all right. It was just a matter of telegraphing Tientsin. The baggage master here attended to it for me.

The refunding of Heloise's ticket money proves to be a more complicated matter. There is no Public-Service Commission to direct the Trans-Siberian in such matters—nothing but the Russian and Chinese Governments. Hindmann thinks that they may be willing to give back half of it. He says that is a common rule among the big steamship companies. Half the railway fare, that is; there will be no refunding of what was paid for the berth, of course. Anyway, Hindmann has taken the ticket and says he can probably get something done within the week.

For myself, I find it difficult to take this matter seriously. I could cheerfully let the money go. But Heloise, I can see, is a little disturbed over it.

We discussed the question of a marriage, this afternoon, she and I. We both want some sort

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

of ceremony. Mainly, I suppose, for the effect on ourselves. And since we are here, with nothing to do but go ahead with our work and our lives, neither Heloise nor I can see any sound reason for delaying. If we were back home, or if she were among friends, it might be well to wait. Though I doubt even that. It would be merely a conventional observance, and would serve no healthy purpose. No, our job now is to go straight ahead with the life that we are to share. And we may as well be about it. So we shall be married, quietly and soberly, sometime within the next few days.

I had thought of the Consulate. But some telephoning on the part of Hindmann drew out the information that our consular and diplomatic officials are not permitted to solemnize marriages, nor to advise regarding the legality of the arrangements. The Consul-General is willing to witness the ceremony officially, but we should have to go down to Tientsin for that, and we both want to be married here in Peking if it is possible.

The peculiar complication is, of course, that China, as an Oriental, non-Christian country, does not solemnize marriages in any way that is recognized in the West. If we were in a European country now, all that would be necessary would

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

be to conform to local customs. But international observances, as among Western peoples, do not hold where China is concerned.

Finally Hindmann said,

"What's the matter with a missionary brother?"

"Why, of course!" replied Heloise. "Are n't we stupid? They are ministers. And I don't think it matters what particular place they happen to be in when they say the words."

Hindmann is inclined to think that we had best go down after all to the Tientsin Consulate and be married there, either by a missionary or by a minister of one of the Settlements. "There's several thousand white folks there," said he. "Pretty sure to be some preachers among 'em. Then, you see, the Consul-General will give you each a certificate, and besides he'll have the marriage put on record at the State Department at Washington. That way, it'll hold all right, I guess."

Heloise and I covertly exchanged glances. We know what is in our hearts. Certificates! . . .

*On the Steamer, "Hsing Mien,"  
Yangtze River. May 1st.*

I FOUND this volume of my journal to-day at the bottom of my trunk. I do not understand why I wrote it. My life is so astonishingly different now. Yet for many years I rarely missed a day. In the earlier volumes — left in my tin trunk, at Peking, with my other books and papers — each little step of the laborious, day-by-day work that has so slowly brought me to my present mastery of my subject, is carefully noted down. I rarely noted mere moods, conversations, personal interests, until this journey to the East. I am amazed, in turning the leaves of this latest and (I think) last volume, to observe that it is almost wholly personal. But I suppose this is natural, considering the extraordinarily personal nature of the events in which I have played so curious and, in the outcome, so wonderful a part.

I don't think I shall make any effort to keep it up. It was the companion of my solitary years. There is no longer the inclination — or even the

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

time. I have a better companion. Why, I hardly realized, until this afternoon, that it has been all but forgotten for ten days. Since my eighteenth birthday, when I began my series of journals in earnest, I have never before neglected this work for a greater space than three days. Excepting, of course, when I was operated upon, four years ago.

As regards my working notes, Heloise insists on keeping those herself. She has discarded the journal method as cumbersome and difficult to index. She has ordered a series of loose-leaf blank books from Kelly and Walsh, at Shanghai. Meantime she is keeping all my memoranda on cards.

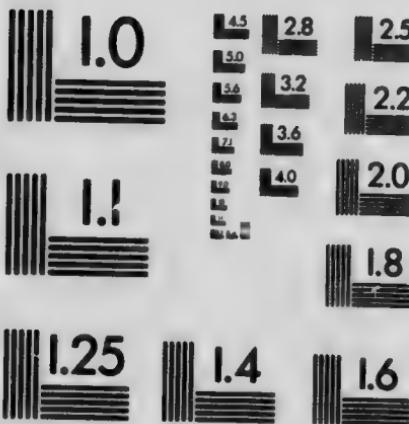
It is rather a surprise to me that I can permit her to rearrange my habits of work in this fashion. But I do permit it. I am even forced to admit that she is already an invaluable assistant.

She says that she wants to help all she can in my work now, while it is possible. Later there will be complications of one sort or the other. She is right at her own work, too; but that, she says, is fun. And she practices every day. I observe her, from hour to hour and day to day, in a curious sort of wonder. It will be some time,



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



APPLIED IMAGE Inc

1653 East Main Street  
Rochester, New York 14609 USA  
(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone  
(716) 288 - 5989 - Fax

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

I see, before I shall really grow to accept it all as fact. I am living in a miracle.

This steamer is a large, modern affair, with electric lights and a very fair table. We are going down to Nanking — three days from Hankow. We came to Hankow by rail from Peking; an interesting journey, and not uncomfortable, barring the dust.

Nanking has been recommended to me as a center of much of the traditional musical culture of China. And as the Yangtze Valley, they say, becomes unbearably hot in the summer-time, we thought it advisable to spend a few weeks there before the worst of the heat sets in. Also, there is some talk that another revolution may break out there, later on. From there we go on to Shanghai for a period of study; then, doubtless, back to Peking and Tientsin.

The great Yangtze proves rather disappointing, scenically. So far, the banks have been flat and muddy most of the way. And the water is yellow when it is not a muddy gray.

But the junks are interesting, with their high timbered sterns and the brown sails with bamboo ribs. Too, I rather like the water buffalo that stand knee deep near the banks and sullenly watch us as we plow majestically by. And the river

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

ports, of course, are quite fascinating. The water beggars paddle out in sampans and large round tubs, and hold up baskets on the ends of bamboo poles in which we of the regal upper deck are supposed to deposit brass cash and small silver.

I have been writing this on the long table in the room that is at once social hall and dining-room for the first cabin passengers. Chinese "boys" slip about in their soft shoes. At the farther end of the table the second engineer—a Scotchman, of course—is playing Sousa records on the talking machine that is his chiefest treasure in this lonely land. He is entertaining a bearded English globe-trotter and an American military man. I can't recall the name of this latter, though we met at the Legation in Peking. We always bow.

Heloise has just come from our stateroom. She has taken the seat opposite, and is watching me as I write. She is smiling a little. I know this, though I will not look up. Not until I finish. For once my eyes rest on hers, my pen will stop.

I know what she wants. It is near the sunset hour. She likes me to be out on deck with her then, and at moonrise. She feels these wonders in some deep corner of her nature. She always becomes very silent, and presses close against my arm.

## ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE

I can feel her eyes on me. I shall not be able to hold out much longer. I want to laugh, and you can not write to any purpose when you are laughing. . . .

I think I shall not write any more.

THE END

be able  
h, and  
ou are